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PEPPERDINE JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATION RESEARCH



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Mission Statement

The *Pepperdine Journal of Communication Research* seeks to pursue truth and academic excellence in the field of communication by recognizing outstanding student scholarship that explores interpersonal, intercultural, organizational, and rhetorical communication. Through rigorous student peer-review, the annual *Journal* strives to contribute to ongoing discussion in communication studies by publishing student papers that investigate a variety of contemporary topics and issues.

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Introduction

The Pepperdine community has experienced many drastic events over the past two years that have dramatically affected what is considered the “typical” Pepperdine experience. From fires to losing a member of our student body to a mass shooting to COVID-19 orders, Pepperdine has had far too many traumatic events, more than most other universities. Yet, it has strengthened our community in a number of ways. The most recent event Pepperdine has faced is the transition to remote classes due to COVID-19. Like so many other universities and colleges, not only have classes shifted entirely online, but campus life and activity as we know it has come to a screeching halt in order to prioritize the safety and health of all. Although students’ daily life, living situations, post-graduate plans, and summer plans were quickly turned upside down without much explanation or expectation for when normalcy will return, the majority of the community has found ways to come together and thrive in these trying times. As a third-year student deeply immersed in the culture of Pepperdine, I am proud to call myself a part of this community because of the way all have exhibited resilience during these trying times.

Resilience does not take the form of a single action, attitude, or way of thinking. It is found in the way students communicate with one another, in the way faculty and staff have made themselves available to students in these unusual circumstances, and in the way the world and our own local communities around us function in order to survive unprecedented circumstances. In this year’s *Journal*, we invited students to write about the different ways in which they have experienced resilience through communication, rhetoric, language, and the world at large. We are extremely grateful to have the input of students who have witnessed resilience in unexpected ways and places and have been able to articulate their experiences in this year’s edition. Beginning with a student’s reflection on the way she’s seen resiliency exhibited in spite of COVID-19, we hope to take readers on a journey of the different ways that our student contributors have found resilience. This issue offers a personal reflection of a student who has lived through the dramatic events at Pepperdine. The concept of resilience is then examined through two research articles examining content creators’ ability to profit despite challenges they are faced with, both in the music industry and in the less-regulated YouTube industry. Two other authors take a different approach, inspecting the ways resilience plays a role in rhetoric and the way those who have had rhetoric used against them in the past have been resilient. Lastly, this issue finishes with a piece by a student who exhibited resilience firsthand in the face of oppression related to gender roles. Our hope is that through these works, the concept of resilience is broadened and communicated in ways that had never been considered before.

From the Editor-in-Chief

I am so proud to have had the privilege to edit this year's *Journal*. It was an incredible experience to be able to work with so many talented students and faculty. The diversity of this year's submissions in light of the current crisis certainly speaks to the resilience exhibited by the Communication division and its students. We hope that you enjoy reading about the ways in which Communication and Resilience go hand-in-hand in our world through the eyes of students who continuously experience, research, and exhibit the ways that the two intersect under unprecedented and unexpected circumstances. Thank you!

Daniela Singleterry, Editor-in-Chief
Pepperdine Journal of Communication Research, 2020

Resiliency vs. the Coronavirus: A Reflection

Shelby Little

Journalism Major: Written as a personal reflection

Nature is a wild and untamed force for which we will never have all the answers, but isn't that what makes it so special? At Pepperdine, we pride ourselves on being Waves. Waves of character, leadership, purpose, and service. Scientifically, waves can come in many different forms, whether it be a sound wave, visible light wave, or a microwave. Yet the wave that overpowers the rest is an ocean wave, the strongest force in nature. When I think of the ocean, I think of a hungry and relentless force, something with a strong foundation that can be stopped by almost nothing. When there is no swell, there is not a ripple, let alone a single wave in sight. The ocean is still, calm, and peaceful. Of course, when there is a swell, the number of waves will differ, but more importantly, the size will increase. Picture waves 80+ feet in size, weighing more than 400 tons, so heavy that the mere impact would instantly kill a human. These waves are made up of billions and billions of tiny drops of water, yet each drop makes a difference. Without all of them working together, this force would not have the ability that it has to crack rock or snap surfboards in half. This image is how Pepperdine students view our community, from the Woolsey fire and Borderline shooting a year ago, to the coronavirus today, and to whatever challenges our future may have in store for us. Throughout these different events, there has been a common theme of resiliency that is constantly being displayed. Resiliency can be defined as, "the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness." or "the ability of a substance or object to spring back into shape; elasticity."

(Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary, 1999) After what we have been through as a school, a community, and a family, we have had many opportunities to display this trait while being there for one another and lifting each other up.

About three months ago, I had no idea what the coronavirus was. I have never been great at following the news and keeping up with different current events that are going on around our country, let alone around the world. As I began to hear more about it and what exactly this virus was, I continued to be optimistic with the view that it was "just a bad cold" and it will pass as everything else does, but oh how wrong I was. Things began escalating quickly and as we returned from spring break, my classes were having conversations about whether or not it was right that we even returned to campus. The thought of not coming back to school, which feels more like home to me now, was not even one that had gone through my mind, but with all the talk and anxiety that infiltrated our campus, it seemed like it wasn't that unlikely. I remember getting that email after soccer practice on Thursday morning and having very mixed emotions. At first as athletes, we thought we were going to be allowed to remain on campus and continue training, but even that got taken away from us. It broke my heart to think about the seniors who were not able to finish their seasons and the hard work that the spring athletes had been putting into training all year round for their opportunity to shine. The next few days were quite chaotic, but it felt more like eerie chaos. All students had to pack up and leave campus as

quickly as they could. Everything we had been looking forward to in the springtime, now taken away by this deadly virus. Walking through an empty campus on Sunday after most of the students had gone home was a gloomy feeling. A place that I had begun to call home, where I was constantly surrounded by people from so many different places around the globe yet I had begun to call my family, completely deserted. I began to reflect on all the things I now feel like I had taken for granted. Simply walking down Upper Dorm Road and passing welcoming faces on my way to class, or walking through the caf and being able to quickly chat with many different friends. Even a simple “hey” or quick hug on the way to the library, these are all special moments from freshman year that I will not get back. Yet through all of these emotions, all of these struggles, the staff at Pepperdine made a point to be there for us. Where else will you receive daily messages and prayers from the President of your University? Or texts from professors, coaches, RA’S, and fellow students reminding you that you are in their thoughts and prayers and simply reaching out a helping hand if you need it?

After returning home, the staff at Pepperdine did not stop their support. We continue to receive constant updates about the virus itself, as well as prayers, encouragement, and check-in emails. This communication is something that does not go unnoticed and has had a great impact on our community. During this time, it is easy to be overtaken by negative emotions. We feel panicked because of the uncertainty of everything. We feel unsettled and worried because many of the things that bring us joy and purpose have been taken away from us. We have been forced to reevaluate our whole lives; everything we have previously labeled as priorities, whether it be school, work, or our sport, has been upended. We have gone from being physically connected to friends and

mentors every single day to not even being allowed to leave the house. As humans, we are very physical creatures. We rely heavily on social interactions and physical touch to display our love and care for one another. We also take pride in our daily, weekly, and monthly routines/schedules. Now, that has all been taken away from us and we have been forced to improvise. After the coronavirus outbreak, but before it completely took away sporting matches, we were no longer allowed to give the other team handshakes before or after a game, but instead had to “elbow-bump” each other in a way to avoid contact as best we could. Similar to this, we have had to find other ways to stay mentally sane and connected. We are back to as normal a school schedule as you can be with everything online, and I think it is good for everyone. It has given us somewhat of a new routine and structure. The fact that we can all come together from across the world and continue to exceed academically is an example of our resiliency. Another way I have seen this being displayed is through our soccer team at Pepperdine. Although distance truly does keep us apart, we continue to meet as a team once a week and check-in with each other while holding each other accountable and continuing to meet the highest standards both physically and mentally that we have set for ourselves. Although we have been “set back” in many ways, we also have an opportunity to use it to grow and excel on our own. Without being forced to go to practice and workout every day, we can focus on other things outside of our sport, whatever it might be. For me, I have begun to do more writing and journaling, as well as different forms of art. This has been very healthy and has opened my mind to things I had not primarily been putting my focus on. It is very unlikely that we will have a time like this ever again, where many people are not allowed to go to work, school, sports, social events, or even the

beach. This is a time in which I have been closer to my family than I think I ever have been before. With three other siblings, it is not very often that we are all home together, but now we get to do just that. We have been brought together, even if it was against our will, but I truly believe that this is a good time for family culture. A time where we must not let our circumstances define our attitudes, but we can show resiliency and display our character in the way that we react. This time is not going to last forever and by slowing down, reflecting, visualizing, and healing, we can get through this together.

Romans 12:11-12 reads, "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." This is especially relevant in our time today and can directly apply to each one of us as we are quarantined at home. We must keep our eyes fixed above and not lose hope. For when this is all finally over, we do not want to be the ones looking back wishing we had done anything differently with the time that we had.

Effect of Hip Hop on Youth Consumerism

Joanna A. Cabalquinto

Written for COM 300: Media Research (Dr. Klive Oh)

Introduction

Hip Hop is a genre that arose from adverse environments, minority groups, and underprivileged youth — mostly the black community and how they expressed themselves through music. Since its origins, Hip Hop has become one of the most profitable businesses in the corporate world, penetrating mainstream media. Its influence extends far beyond that of the music industry, permeating various other areas of society like fashion, politics, and even slang thus creating an entire culture surrounding Hip Hop. Examples of the synergy between these seemingly separate industries are the “NBA Unleashed” Powerbeats Pro commercial which features “The Codes We Live By” by Travis Scott and an AT&T Wireless commercial featuring a song by Dreamville, founded by J.Cole. These two commercials combine sports, music, and technology into one succinct 30 second money-making advertisement.

Throughout the past 20 years, Hip Hop established its own reputation in the media, being featured in films, commercials, and other digital mediums like social media. However, Hip Hop, like other forms of music, cannot be understood without the frame of its historical and social context. One key musical element of Hip Hop is Rap, the vocal delivery of rhythmic speech usually expressed over a backing track, which has become one of the most influential commodities in mainstream music. Rap music reflects its origin of young, urban, working-class African-Americans which allows this otherwise underrepresented group to use their voice to call attention to

socio-political issues. Although its target audience may be comprised of teenagers and young adults, the music is universal and can appeal to a global audience of any age — evidenced by Hip Hop’s ability to remain on the U.S. Billboard Music Charts with songs consistently featured in the Hot 100. The Billboard Charts are ranked according to sales, streams, or airplay and can be dedicated to a specific genre or cover all genres to provide weekly chart updates in addition to the Year End charts. The Hot 100 compiles all three data sets (sales, streams, and airplay) into a chart to gauge the relative popularity of a song or genre.

Audiences perceive celebrities to hold certain meanings and the more they believe they are similar, the more persuasive the celebrity’s message will be. Consumers who align themselves with the messages presented in such music are thus exposed to brand endorsements and product placements associated with these artists in greater volumes. This can cause young, impressionable consumers, particularly Millennials and Gen Z, to associate specific brands and products with certain ideologies and personas causing a change in their buying habits.

Hip Hop artists consider certain brands to be part of their identity and incorporate them in their music, videos, and everyday lifestyle by verbally or visually showcasing them (Coveney, 2004). Artists often “use brands as points of comparison — whether to uplift their own status or to belittle the status of another” (de Gregorio, Federico, and Yongjun Sung, 2009). Drake, a

four-time Grammy award-winning rapper and founder of OVO Sound Record Label, and Pharrell, who is best known for his Grammy-winning work as a musician and producer and hit song “Happy,” are just two of the industry’s leading artists in charge of major pop-culture and fashion trends, yet already amassed their own clothing lines and partnerships. Others include A\$AP Rocky’s partnership with Under Armour and Kanye West’s partnership with Adidas. Big brands are partnering with artists to release lines associated with their image and cumulate support from their already established fanbases. Youths that idolize these artists may be inclined to purchase products they endorse in an effort to emulate them. As a result, brand managers are adapting Hip Hop to advertise products and reach an extended range of consumers, garnered through the cross-over of other genres with Hip Hop.

In this study, a researcher from Pepperdine University will be conducting focus groups with a predetermined set of questions consisting of individuals who have been recruited through a convenience sample. The effects of Hip Hop culture on youth consumer behavior is important to note because most industries have been touched by the influence of Hip Hop culture which continues to shape behaviors of the youth beyond that of simply listening to music. With rapidly changing methods of consumption, it is important to note ways advertisers have adapted this resilient genre to the evolving consumerist industry.

Literature Review

Music helps the youth create their identities by acting as a symbol that “anchors youth subcultures” (Burkhalter and Thornton, 2014). Young audiences often use music and its corresponding content to establish themselves and learn about fashion, lifestyle choices, and even social issues. The music industry has had

to adapt to changes in the market due to new means of distribution and listening platforms. The power of music in regards to the youth is important to many advertisers because today’s consumers are becoming increasingly difficult to persuade through traditional marketing tactics. Therefore, brands are turning to more unobtrusive forms of advertising to reach young consumers by integrating their content with mainstream media.

Marketing and brand placement in different areas of the entertainment industry allows audiences to “buy lifestyles and experiences” to express a sense of self by identifying with a particular artist they enjoy (Burkhalter and Thornton, 2014). Music plays an essential role in multiple cultures as a mode of entertainment and means for conveying said culture. One study found that 93% of the US population spends over 25 hours a week listening to songs making music the most listened to form of media (Craig, Flynn, and Holody, 2017). It is a form of socialization that communicates values and expectations because of its ability to document cultural changes across time (Craig, Flynn, and Holody, 2017).

Young people tend to be more susceptible to the consumption of goods or services that convey certain meanings because they experience insecurities and use their symbolic properties to express themselves. The symbolic properties associated with such brands and products signal a certain social position that allows young people to conform to group norms (Piacentini and Mailer, 2004). Products are social tools that allow individuals to cultivate their identity and make assumptions about the identities of others based on their possessions. Parasocial relationships that are formed by consumers with artists through identification with certain characteristics enhance the effectiveness of branding through music as a consumer’s desire to mirror what they see or

hear develops (Craig, Flynn, and Holody, 2017). Socially consumed products are heavily influenced by luxury items that help project a certain image. Advertisers have recently capitalized on Hip Hop artists and their tendency to reference such luxury goods to highlight their accomplishments with products that are symbolic of the upper-class which was once elusive to them (Burkhalter and Thornton, 2014).

Artists can make brand references for personal or artistic motivations. Mentioning certain brands in song lyrics or showcasing them in videos may be a tribute or tactic to enhance their status (Ferguson, 2015). These mentions sometimes lead to endorsement deals. For example, while Run DMC did not initially receive or seek out compensation for their hit “My Adidas” in which they mentioned the brand 22 times, they earned a 1.5 million dollar endorsement contract following it (Bettig and Hall, 2012). So, although it may not be their initial intention, an artist may gain opportunities or compensation afterwards. The relationship between advertisers and artists is mutually beneficial, especially now that the sell-out stigma is gone and artists are more willing to partner with brands.

Most artists cannot rely on radio airplay for promotion because companies have streamlined and standardized their playlists in order to cut costs, creating less exposure for more artists (Taylor, 2009). This causes them to seek out brands to place their music into their advertisements. Artists tend to align themselves with companies that already coincide with their image. Thus creating a relationship “built on the truth of popular culture's perception of the music and the brand. The music is cool. The brand is cool. And both can become part of the DNA of how a person defines him or herself” (Taylor, 2009).

Product placement allows an artist to bring their personality to the product, and more generally, to the brand, potentially creating positive associations for the consumer between the brand and the artist. A brand's reputation can be reinforced or elevated by its exposure in popular entertainment while giving entertainment a more realistic feel. Official deals between brands and artists are preferred to be kept secret to assure credibility for both parties involved. Corporations that use celebrity endorsements to garner interest and increase loyalty want consumers to think artists are incorporating brands into their art because they genuinely like them, not because they were paid endorsements (Craig, Flynn, and Holody, 2017).

These paid endorsements have become increasingly appealing to brand managers as television commercials are displaced by other means of streaming media. Billions of dollars are invested into advertising and the growing worry that television commercials are no longer being viewed has led to the “convergence of content and commerce” — a phrase that describes the role advertising plays in the production of popular culture (Taylor, 2009). The rise of “branded entertainment” has caused an increase of brand placement in media forms like film and music to get consumers' attention by making their advertisements as compelling as the programming in areas they already take interest in (Taylor, 2009).

Brand placement in music videos has been found to impact brand memory and attitude with high return rates — 27 times the cost — as an artist's image is reflected onto the brands being endorsed (Craig, Flynn, and Holody, 2017). When a fan watches a music video for a song they enjoy, they are already responsive to the information presented in it. This ‘self-reinforcing’ nature means once a viewer watches a music video, they recall the

visual imagery from the video any time they hear the song afterwards (Burkhalter and Thornton, 2014). However, the effectiveness of brand placements relies on its congruence to the message of the media already presented by the artists. Congruence is conceptualized by two things, relevancy and expectancy. Relevancy is “the extent to which information detracts or contributes to the primary message being communicated” and expectancy as “delineating the degree to which information follows a pre established conceptual pattern” (Ferguson and Burkhalter, 2015). In this case, Hip Hop culture shares a communal sense of fashion, music, art, language, dance, etc. meaning that congruence refers to moments where a brand corresponds with this notion of culture (Ferguson and Burkhalter, 2015). A brand is considered incongruent when they diverge from the established patterns of hip hop culture and consumers are then less receptive to their marketing.

Therefore, in order to fully utilize Hip Hop culture for sales, advertisers need to understand the core messages of the culture they are trying to appeal to. However, because of the increase in branded entertainment, there has been increased amounts of the commercialization of music as artists attempt to profit off of their craft. Young audiences are particularly susceptible to this commercialization because of their desire to construct and perpetuate images similar to artists they admire. When advertising messages appear congruent to the art, young adults are more likely to readily accept the product because of its association with an artist they have a parasocial relationship with. This rise of branding and marketing has coincided with Hip Hop’s ascension into popular culture causing it to have a commonplace in the lives of young adults as they make their purchase decisions.

Research Question/Hypothesis

The research question being posed is, “How has Hip Hop culture made a social significance towards young adults in terms of advertising and brand endorsements?” The objective of this study is to analyze the impact of Hip Hop culture on the U.S. youth to find out how marketers are integrating Hip Hop culture in their brand and to understand Hip Hop culture’s influence on consumer buying habits. Whether this is done by having the music playing in commercials or having a collaboration with an artist as the “face” of their campaign, Hip Hop culture is the lens through which consumer behavior and its effects on sales will be looked at.

As previously mentioned, Hip Hop culture encompasses more than just music. It extends to other industries and areas of life associated with behavioral patterns of those who partake in the art being affected. Hip Hop has consistently held a place in the top music charts with messages referencing anything from luxury goods and excess lifestyles to social and political oppression. These messages resonate particularly strongly with today’s youth, particularly those who fall within the Millennial and Gen Z range, who are growing up in the society referenced in the lyrics and videos. Thus, as their admiration for certain artists grows, so does their likelihood of buying products that they perceive will help them identify with the same social group as the artist they are attempting to emulate. This has caused brand managers to turn to the music industry and product placement to reach audiences like these and convert their musical interests into sales. Through analyzing the history, brand campaigns, and the behavior of young consumers, a stronger understanding of Hip Hop culture’s effect on this market and insight on the industry’s future can be acquired.

Method

Research Design

In order to collect data, participants will be asked to take part in a focus group during which they will be given a preliminary questionnaire to start. The focus group will allow participants to interact and influence one another's responses as they would in an uncontrolled environment. The questions were written open-endedly to avoid forcing participants into any assumptions based on a question's wording. The target sample size for each focus group was around six to eight participants who met at the Media Center of Payson Library for about an hour to discuss Hip Hop culture, their perceptions of it, and if their buying habits or brand attitudes have ever been influenced by Hip Hop's endorsement of a particular brand or product. The independent variable is the product placement and branding that is commonplace in Hip Hop culture. The dependent variable is the youth consumer behavior towards these brands that may be affected by Hip Hop influence. The focus group is aimed to give the researchers a deeper and more personal insight into what attracts young consumers to Hip Hop as well as how their overall attitudes towards specific brands were affected when attached to an artist's name. Analysis of the information obtained through the focus groups will allow the researchers to understand how much influence Hip Hop has on their buying habits and why they remain loyal to specific brands — and how loyalty can be increased when associated with certain artists.

Sample

The population for this study consisted of college-aged young adults from 18 to 23 years old. 59.4% identified as male and 40.6% identified as female with 53% of participants being from California. The researchers utilized convenience sampling to

conduct the focus groups and pull a segment of the total population that is presumed to represent it. Convenience sampling was chosen out of necessity due to time constraints and limited access to research participants. The researchers held seven focus groups consisting of about six to eight Pepperdine students willing to voluntarily dedicate time to this study. Additionally, the individuals asked to take part were known to either listen to Hip Hop music or self-identify either as a fan of the music or with Hip Hop culture. The first focus group was composed solely of members of the Sigma Phi Epsilon Pepperdine chapter who were known personally by one of the researchers as patrons of Hip Hop culture. The other three consisted of Pepperdine students recruited from various on-campus locations. Demographically, the researchers utilized an ethnically diverse sample with members of both genders present from Pepperdine's population. The researchers aimed to avoid ethnic/racial homogeneity by reaching out to various on-campus clubs that the researchers are a part of like Black Student Association, Filipino American Student Association, and Latino Student Association. Especially since Hip Hop culture originated in historically racially-oppressed Afro-American urban communities with messages rooted in socioeconomic struggles and differences endured.

Procedure

Each focus group began with a preliminary questionnaire given to each participant as they entered the room and sat at the designated table. The questionnaire consisted of 10 questions (Appendix A) on paper allowing the researchers to gather data on basic demographics questions and general opinions and cognizance of Hip Hop. The questionnaires from all groups were later compiled by inputting each participant's

answers into a Google form. This compilation was referred to by the researcher during analysis of conversational themes that persisted throughout the focus group sessions. Following the preliminary questionnaire, a discussion moderated by the researcher centered on a series of questions (Appendix A) — from broader to more specific, like a funnel — to place to help participants become more comfortable with sharing their candid thoughts. Each discussion lasted around 45 minutes. Each question was posed one at a time and had an approximate response time of five minutes which varied between focus groups with major points and general notes of discussion being recorded in a Google Doc by the researcher. The researcher remained largely removed from discussion, only serving to propose the next question, to help foster more interaction amongst participants and allow them to answer each question to their fullest. During the focus group, participants were also shown music videos that prominently feature product placement (Appendix C). Lastly, each focus group closed with the same post-discussion question, “How has this conversation changed your perceptions of Hip Hop, if at all?”

Instrument

This study required a more personalized approach for answers in order to note the engagement between participants. The focus group allowed participants to express in entirety their opinions and sentiments about Hip Hop and discuss detail their consumer habits and social media consumption in detail. Below are a few questions asked during the focus group with the full list available in Appendix B.

Questions from the preliminary questionnaire:

- 1) Through what mediums (social media, commercials, posters) have you seen brands

advertise with Hip Hop artists the most?

- 2) Are you more likely to purchase from a brand if it is associated with your favorite Hip Hop artist?

These are essential questions to help the researchers gain a feel for the participants and their level of attachment to Hip Hop prior to the focus group allowing the researchers to use them as a conversation starter. It also allows the researchers to see how they are receiving information regarding Hip Hop artists collaboration with brands or exposure to their music in general. Overall, they allow the researchers to briefly see Millennial & Gen Z buying habits and consumer behavior as it pertains to Hip Hop culture.

Examples of focus group questions:

- 1) What are the differences you notice in today's Hip Hop compared to the old-school 1980s & 1990s?
- 2) What are some brands that have a mention of Hip Hop artists in their commercials or publicity efforts? Which ones are memorable? How does it make you feel?
- 3) Do you own any products that artists collaborated with?

These questions go deeper into the personal perceptions of each participant on the topic of Hip Hop culture and brand endorsements. The first question allows the participants to call out the differences they notice in today's Hip Hop music and see how they feel about the changes in content and visuals. The second question allows participants to list brands that have been successful in making their collaborations notable to the consumers as well as giving us an insight at the Millennial and Gen Z perception regarding those collaborations. The third question takes it a step further by having the participants identify specific

collaborations they purchase and proudly own allowing the researchers to measure if one's love for Hip Hop increases their likelihood of purchasing a product.

Findings

There are three prominent themes that were major points of discussion in each focus group, starting with general attitudes towards Hip Hop, and the culture surrounding it, to personal ideologies and purchase intent. First, the researchers found that participants were critical of Hip Hop to some degree and did not find its current state favorable because of the heavy commercialization within the genre. There was a sense of dissatisfaction/frustration with the industry and the cultural appropriation of "black music." Some participants rejected the idea of people trying to identify with Hip Hop and tap into the culture when they are clearly an out-group. Rap used to be centered on the experiences of African American communities. One participant noted their desire for Hip Hop to regress back to messages of overcoming adversity instead of the materialistic ideals that are commonly promoted nowadays.

Another participant viewed Hip Hop culture as "an avenue for exploitation of culture" as it tends to normalize the "N-word" through its use in the lyrics of multiple songs. Additionally, as mentioned previously, Hip Hop culture affects the use of slang in the English language which in turn changes how young adults converse, potentially leading to the use of such racial slurs and cultural appropriation. It is "easy to rise when you go the Hip Hop route because people imitate that 'story' of growth and difficulty which sells" allowing people who do not live or understand those experiences to make music about it for profit.

Another noted that Hip Hop culture was "highly influential, but not always in the best way" and explained how artists can create certain images and blur perceptions of the negative messages that are involved with their experience. However, it is important to note that each focus group had participants ranging in ethnic background. This sentiment might be based on the demographic of the group and whether people who feel more strongly towards Hip Hop are more critical of it. Another aspect of Hip Hop culture that participants were critical of was the misogyny depicted not only in lyrics but in the visual objectification of women through music videos. This leads into the second major theme — the interplay between personal ideologies, social views, and overall worldview and perceptions of Hip Hop.

Some participants stated that their buying habits might be affected by their perceptions of an artist and whether or not they like or support them. According to one participant, although Hip Hop is a "mainstream commodity" nowadays, it still has the ability to produce and tell stories. It is a proactive genre that always changes according to current trends, but also has the ability to create them. A specific example that came up and sparked debate was Chris Brown and his past with abusing women, naming Rihanna as an example — inconclusive on whether or not people should separate art from the artist, artist from the brand, art from the brand, etc.

One participant said that they "would have to like both the artist and the brand beforehand but a successful partnership with an artist they like would give an extra push towards one of two competing brands." Whether or not art should be separated from the artists, one participant declared that wherever the line drawn needs to be consistent without making exceptions for certain people. Many participants agreed in

saying whether or not an artist's personal ideologies should affect your consumption of their products should have a consistent standard which leads into the next theme.

Thirdly, participants discussed what things affect personal decisions to purchase a brand and certain aspects of consumer behavior and its relation to Hip Hop. Surprisingly, the researchers found that Hip Hop itself was not very influential when referring to someone's buying intentions. Rather, participants stated that they tended to buy from brands they already have an established relationship with because there is already a level of trust for the quality of a product. This loyalty can be enhanced if a brand brings in an artist they like but consumers are less likely to swap brands solely because of a partnership. Multiple participants agreed in saying that "good product is more important," the person advertising it tends to be irrelevant because consumers care more about the quality they are getting. One participant mentioned Travis Scott's collaboration with Nike — combination of both his favorite artist and favorite brand — stating his preference for artists that collaborate with already established brands rather than creating their own, adding that "logos of already established brands are enticing." Therefore, pre-existing relationships with brands are enhanced when seen with a favored artist, thus reinforcing a consumer's purchase decisions.

Additionally, if a brand is known to represent or support causes the participant perceives as ethical then an artist is associated with them, consumers are more receptive because "they are supporting a cause, not just a brand or product." One participant noted that if they do not agree with an artist's code of ethics, then they would not buy their specific collaboration but the brand as a whole would remain largely unaffected. Another noted that in some extreme cases,

they would be deterred from a brand because it becomes more about personal ideals than product. Partnering with a problematic artist reflects back onto the company's morals because of their willingness to support the messages they are putting out. Others disagreed saying "people have a natural inclination to look up to someone" and so when they promote a product consumers may be willing to overlook some negative aspects and consider purchasing. Another deterring factor of brand endorsements and product placements is how prominently featured in the art.

Discussion

While some of the researcher's findings for the focus group were to be expected, some participant's answers were also surprising and unique based on the circumstance of the question. Past studies stated that consumers would buy a product, and even switch brands, if endorsed by a celebrity that they support. This suggested a direct relationship between product placements and endorsements and consumer buying intentions. However, the researchers found that this relationship is not as explicit as previously made out to be. According to the data gathered from the focus groups, young adults are more inclined to purchase brands that are partnered with their favorite Hip Hop artist if the product is a collaboration with an already established brand they currently have a relationship with. This is because they are guaranteed the quality associated with the logo. As a result, collaborations and partnerships fared more favorably than when an artist attempts to create their own brand. This brand loyalty creates a "self-reinforcing" relationship once a consumer watches a music video or listens to lyrics that fortify their purchase decisions (Burkhalter and Thornton, 2014).

Advertisements in the music industry are increasing rapidly because of the vast amounts of money being invested into advertising. The inability to completely separate the two has led to the “convergence of content and commerce” which shows how essential advertising’s role in the production of popular culture is (Taylor, 2009). The rise of such “branded entertainment” has caused an increased volume of brand placement in varying media forms to get consumers’ attention by aligning their advertisement with entertainment media a consumer is already intaking (Taylor, 2009). However, this has led to some negative sentiments towards Hip Hop culture as the focus has been placed on advertisement causing people to put things out because they want to get noticed, not because they want to develop themselves as artists.

Participants stated how artists can lose their authenticity with partnerships because their music then becomes more about clout than their inner thoughts. One response to the music video for “Gucci Gang” that was screened in front of the focus group was a feeling of a sort of caricature. One participant stated that Gucci was referenced so many times and was too prominent causing Migos to “degrade the name because of how silly it is in saturation.” The abundance of brand endorsements and product placements in Hip Hop causes it to lose value as consumers’ attention to it diminishes. Rather, specialization — when an artist is more loyal to one brand — is more effective. Yet, many participants identified designer brands as a major characteristic of Hip Hop culture, showing how they “subconsciously have associated designer brands with status because of artists without even realizing.”

Conclusion

Through thorough analysis, the researchers concluded that young adults are

heavily influenced by Hip hop artists in how they perceive advertisements and make purchasing decisions — whether cognizant of the effect of commercialization of music on them or not. Currently, there is a big emphasis on consumerism within the genre, many songs iterate the significance of owning things, objectifying objects and people while they talk about wealth and status. The level of influence that Hip Hop culture holds over consumer buying intentions is profound considering how Hip Hop is a genre of music born out of underprivileged African American communities. Hip Hop artists used to use music as an avenue to talk about their lives and the issues in the socioeconomic environment. However, it is no surprise that Hip Hop infiltrated mainstream culture because their experiences and hardships were relatable to many other minority groups who looked to specific artists to articulate their experiences in the universal language of music. Despite their much faced adversity, Hip Hop culture has penetrated society past the confines of the music industry making it impossible to ignore. Engulfing more than music, Hip Hop is oftentimes considered a social movement that gained popularity in the 1970s to constructively use their energy towards bringing awareness to their experiences. Hip hop, a musical genre and cultural phenomenon originating from an oppressed minority in American history, has displayed resilient influence on today's youth by becoming an integral part of pop culture and consumerism. Therefore, it is important to study how Hip Hop influences the youth and their consumption of media because of its prevalence in even unconscious perceptions of society and branded entertainment.

Limitations and Further Research

In this study there were varying levels of expertise on Hip Hop culture because participants self-identified as knowledgeable

on the topic. It is possible that the differing racial/ethnic identities present in each focus group promoted groupthink between those who identified similarly. Ethnic minorities might have been pressured to agree with the majority or self-censor more controversial thoughts pertaining to the exploitation of Black culture and normalization of the “N-word.” Oppositely, those who identified as White might not have wanted to disagree with ethnic minorities and their opinions so they would not appear to be oppressive or ignorant to racial dynamics in Hip Hop. Additionally, there was much more information and analysis that could have

taken place had there been no time constraint which would have allowed the researchers to gain even better insight on purchase history and understanding for how commercialization of Hip Hop culture translates to sales. In future studies, it would be beneficial to ask participants to further elaborate on their answers in order to fully understand their reasoning and logic behind buying habits. It would also be constructive for the researchers to allot more time to the analysis of discourse conducted with each focus group immediately after, rather than waiting a few days before discussion.

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Appendix A

Focus Group Questions:

1. How would you define Hip Hop culture? What are words that come to mind?
2. What is your knowledge of early 1980s-1990s hip hop?
3. Who are the top Hip Hop artists today?
4. Who do you view as the most influential hip Hop Artist of all time and how do they compare to the current leading artist now?
5. What are the differences you notice in what they wear and how they rap?
6. How has Hip Hop's influence on young adults changed from the early 1980s-1990 compared to current artists today?
7. What are some songs that you can recall that mention brand products or names?
8. What are some brands that have a mention of a Hip Hop artist in their commercials or publicity efforts? Which ones do you remember? How did it make you feel?
9. Do you personally own any partnerships/collaborations?
10. With today's current status in technology, which platform or mediums do you use the most that provide advertisements of brands utilizing Hip Hop artists?
11. How important is social media to a Hip Hop artist's career or does it not matter at all?

Appendix B

Videos Screened in Front of Focus Groups:

- "Motor Sport" by Migos, Nicki Minaj, and Cardi B
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gV_rtaYezyY
- "Versace" by Migos
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rF-hq_CHNH0
- "Wish Wish" by DJ Khaled feat. Cardi B and 21 Savage
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oq8z-U3bPgo>
- "Bad and Boujee" by Migos feat. Lil Uzi Vert
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S-sJp1FfG7Q>

The 3 P's: Pewdiepie, Popularity, & Popularity

Lea Medina

Written for COM 300: Media Research (Dr. Klive Oh)

Introduction

Felix Arvid Ulf Kjellberg—more affectionately referred to as Pewdiepie—is statistically the most successful YouTuber, with a net worth of over \$15 million and over 100 million subscribers. With a channel that has uploaded over 4,000 videos, it becomes natural to question how one person can gain such popularity and profit just by sitting in front of a camera. It seems that Pewdiepie's more controversial actions such as using offensive language have ultimately only added to his popularity; these moments of criticism show that he is a character of resilience in an industry of ever-changing trends. While gaming has been widely overlooked in the past, it became the “most popular and profitable form of entertainment” (D'Argenio, 2018). Content creators stand to gain financially from brand deals, sponsored videos, and other ways of promoting video and mobile games. By 2021, the gaming industry is set to make 180.1 billion dollars (Dobrilova, 2019). Not only can Pewdiepie be seen as a character of resilience but the gaming industry, through which Pewdiepie made a name for himself, can also be seen as a powerful force of resilience. By studying what factors make Pewdiepie's videos so popular and how he obtains money from that online success, it will be easier to understand how content creators will profit on YouTube in the future and how others can mimic such resilience. This research also helps to better understand the mind of a consumer and what they value in an online personality.

Many terms need to be conceptualized within this research question. A YouTube

Channel is an online profile created on the website YouTube where users can upload their original video content to the site. The factors of his channel that will be explored are his relationships with the viewers, his personality, relationship with his wife, and behavioral patterns.

Horton and Wohl's Parasocial Interaction Theory states that interacting with mediated figures, such as YouTube personalities, can cause viewers to feel like they have formed real relationships despite that relationship being one-sided. Parasocial Interaction Theory helps to answer the question of why Pewdiepie is so profitable. For starters, Pewdiepie has created an atmosphere in his online community in which subscribers believe they are interacting with him in a meaningful way. Subscribers can post on his subreddit (an online hub to talk about shared interests) and hope Pewdiepie displays their post in his newest video. Pewdiepie has been committed to posting once a day for over six years which ensures a constant presence in his subscribers' lives so as not to be forgotten. Finding ways to connect with and support Pewdiepie has never been so easy. From wearing his merchandise to buying his sponsored gamer energy drink, there seems to be no limit to how Pewdiepie can influence his large subscriber base.

The question is both relevant and significant because YouTube is continuing to grow and expand its user base. Within this modern context specifically, YouTube has a reliable audience who watch their favorite channels regularly as if tuning in to a network show. YouTube stars are making so much off

their online content that the pursuit of a YouTube career is becoming increasingly more common and desirable. In the United Kingdom and United States alone, being a YouTuber is about 3 times more likely to be chosen as a career amongst children than being an astronaut (Berger, 2019). Looking at the Parasocial Interaction Theory, it can be seen how modern consumers turn to YouTube to be entertained through the most mundane means. The shift in entertainment from professionally generated content (PGC) to user-generated content (UGC) is important to professional industries (entertainment, film, advertising, etc.) as this reveals consumer behavior. The increasing use of YouTube signifies an interest in varying forms of content.

In conclusion, this study will research the factors that make Pewdiepie successful on the YouTube platform by analyzing the relationship between his popularity and profitability. By studying these aspects of the most popular YouTube channel, the goal is to further understand what garners financial success on YouTube so future users of the platform and researchers can better predict what makes or breaks a new YouTube personality. This research seeks to find how social media personalities, specifically YouTube stars, can become resilient figures of influence over their viewers despite their shortcomings. By understanding this, our study will gain insight into how content creators, namely Youtubers, can create relationships with their audience and, through that, gain a profit.

Literature Review

YouTube is a social media platform that has transformed the world of new media. It affects how viewers find entertainment (i.e. “Vlogging, gaming, style tutorials”) (Craig & Cunningham, 2017). YouTube, itself, has had a transformation since its user-generated

centric creation to its now professionally-generated content selection. The content uploaded to YouTube in 60 days is the same amount of content that would be broadcast over a span of 60 years (Figueiredo, Benevenuto, & Almeida, 2011). The astonishing rate of content available to the online world is often overlooked because only some content creators and videos are deemed as popular. Online celebrities arise from the creation of YouTube as these created personalities begin to post their videos at a constant rate. As YouTubers gain more views, they increase in popularity. The most popular YouTuber, in terms of the number of views, is Felix Arvid Ulf Kjellberg otherwise known as Pewdiepie. Using the Parasocial Interaction Theory, Hegemonic Masculinity Theory, Inclusive Masculinities Theory, it becomes possible to understand why he can gain such a following as well as indicating what makes him profitable. Discovering why Pewdiepie’s videos are so popular is important as these are personalities that greatly influence large populations. It is important for many industries to better understand the relationship between content creator and viewer. Looking to Parasocial Interaction Theory, it is important to know what can make a subscriber so loyal to someone they have never met.

Social Media is something that is commonly used but it is difficult to define. To conceptualize such a medium, it is useful to view social media as a “proto-industry” made up of content creators who “engage in content innovation” to a global community (Craig & Cunningham, 2017). This is an ever-growing industry that allows for anyone to gain a following via the follow-button through platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, etc. The increase in the use of social media also brings an influx of social media influencers. These are “organizational advocates in the new medium of social media

for strategic communication” (Au, Pang, & Sng, 2019). In this case, social media is the platform by which Pewdiepie can communicate with his viewers.

Social media and its influencers create a world in which a select number of individuals can gain a position of power over their followers. Dr. Mingyi Hou, a communication researcher at Tilburg University, notes that there is a difference between traditional celebrities and a social media celebrity. This new version of celebrity found online can avoid jumping through many hoops to achieve a more temporary and limited level of fame. Hou writes that since social media influencers are native to online platforms, it is harder for them to break out to other levels of fame beyond the internet (Hou, 2018). Amongst the many platforms of social media, there is one channel in particular that can innovatively produce influencers: YouTube.

YouTube is a platform that generally allows anyone to upload videos online that anyone in the world can view. It is also the platform through which Pewdiepie has found internet fame and fortune. Dr. Jin Kim, of the College of Saint Rose, claims that YouTube used to be a site for mainly amateur creators who used the platform as a way to express themselves through user-generated content (UGC). However, it has now turned into a platform for professionally-generated content (PGC) which is content created by well-known large media corporations that is normally found on other channels. Kim describes how traditional media TV channels, such as ABC and NBC, found that using YouTube to broadcast their TV shows helped in ad revenue as well as the number of views (Kim, 2012). Though PGC creators have shown their large presence on YouTube, UGC is very much thriving on the platform. Many viewers consider UGC to be a more authentic experience than that which is professionally

created (Kim, 2012). A big part of viewing content on YouTube is being able to experience more of a realistic sense of humanity unlike the high production world of studio television. Stuart Cunningham and David Craig, in their research, found that there seem to be three types of content genres that viewers tend to enjoy from amateur content creators: “vlogging, gameplay, and style tutorials” (2017). Pewdiepie is most known for his gameplay videos which show him playing video games, an interesting choice seeing as he is not known for being very good at playing these games. Parasocial Interaction Theory, as described by Donald Horton and Richard Wohl, is the theory that helps explain why people can form “real” relationships with distant mediating figures (Rihl & Wegener, 2019). Because Pewdiepie is not an exceptional gamer, his lack of skills come across as relatable and create a comfortable atmosphere that viewers respond well to. They can form a pseudo friendship with him.

Mingyi Hou looks to beauty and lifestyle YouTuber, Zoe Sugg. Zoella, her YouTube persona, often lets her audience know that she is not a “professional expert” as she gives her tutorials which creates a level of informality (2018). This informality and persona of the “girl next door” allows viewers to see her as a friend, rather than just a stranger online (Hou, 2018). Parasocial Interaction Theory says that these viewers will then have this sense of a real friendship with Zoella as well as loyalty that they will take to the store with them. If Zoella is to vocalize her opinion on any brand or product, her followers are likely to think the same way. In this same way, Pewdiepie has the same effect on his followers. Horton and Wohl, with their theory, say that “viewers’ reactions to television broadcasts resemble those of people engaged in face-to-face interactions” (Rihl & Wegener, 2019). The same can be said for

subscribers to YouTubers. In regards to Pewdiepie, there are quite a few factors that help build to the characterization of such a YouTube giant. Kristy Beers Fägersten, an associate professor at Södertörn University, Sweden, claims that viewers can look at Pewdiepie as a friend because he can disarm barriers of formality with his physical and verbal language (2017). The greatest contributor to this approachability is his excessive use of cursing. Fägersten cites cursing as an event that happens amongst friends in an informal setting (2017). Pewdiepie's use of explicit language (especially his use of English as a native Swedish speaker) allows his audience to see a friend in him. Pewdiepie especially gained popularity through his uploading of videos in the "Let's Play genre" in which he plays video games on-screen and provides a commentary (Fägersten, 2017). This act of playing popular video games online in front of an audience also strengthens the sense of friendship amongst viewers. Fägersten looks further as she dissects certain videos within Pewdiepie's Let's Play genre. In one video, she cites the use of 73 curse words, averaging 5.2 swear words per minute (Fägersten, 2017). It is these videos that launched him to his level of popularity and it appears that the cursing was a large factor in that outcome.

Masculinity is another factor to look at to explain Pewdiepie's popularity. The majority of gamers are males and Pewdiepie does well to strengthen this inequality in gender ratios. Raewynn Connell describes Hegemonic Masculinities Theory (HMT) as a "configuration of gender practice that ideologically legitimates...the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Maloney, Roberts, & Caruso, 2018). As of 2015, male gamer viewers made up about 80% of the gendered landscape. Pewdiepie's level of masculine talk within his Let's Play genre may strengthen the

masculinity that the majority of his viewers can relate to. It has been found that the Parasocial relationship between the mediating figure and the viewer strengthens the more similarities there seem to be between the two parties (Rihl & Wegener, 2019). Though Pewdiepie may not make such explicit misogynistic remarks as his gamer counterparts, he does play into masculine mannerisms. By repeatedly making sexual jokes that affirm masculinity and even going as far as making homophobic remarks, Pewdiepie can "legitimize" the position of men at a place of power while making homosexual men and women the point of laughter. He can reconcile this with his viewers by bringing in his girlfriend and fellow gamer, Marzia Bisognin, to his videos (Maloney, Roberts, & Caruso, 2018). By having a female present, Pewdiepie sends a message that he is familiar and supportive of females. His eminent presence can dwarf her smaller, feminine figure when he makes hypersexual jokes as they engage in a Let's Play game (Maloney, Roberts, & Caruso, 2018). This can often be seen as him only furthering his legitimization of the dominant man while others see the importance of having a female present to offer a more inclusive insight within Pewdiepie videos. Since Maloney et al.'s research was conducted in 2018, Felix Kjellberg and Marzia Bisognin have gotten married so it is interesting to see if that new relationship status will affect how viewers see him, his commitment to YouTube, his behavior, etc. Regardless, there is also another theory that must be discussed: Inclusive Masculinities Theory (IMT). This theory says that "boys and young men [of Western Culture]" are beginning to care less about whether they are seen as homosexual or not. This focuses on the more inclusive and affectionate behavioral patterns displayed by men. While Pewdiepie may display behaviors that legitimize masculinity, he may also use

this difference between men and women to more effectively appear inclusive. Maloney, Roberts, & Caruso note that this inclusive behavior may be seen as “a form of ironic heterosexual recuperation”. These researchers see Pewdiepie’s behavior as a way to more subtly shift from a way of explicit “marginalization” but rather to a more inclusive route (2018).

Understanding who Pewdiepie is, as a YouTuber, helps to explain why his viewers relate to him, but it’s also important to understand why YouTube videos, in general, become popular. YouTube videos’ popularity is significant because it affects industries from “technological, economic, and social perspectives” (Figueiredo, Benevenuto, & Almeida, 2011). Content is uploaded to YouTube at quite an astonishing rate, so how does any video have a chance at becoming a “hit”? Researchers from the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais ultimately found that YouTube’s internal and search mechanisms contribute highly to how videos are found (Figueiredo, Benevenuto, & Almeida, 2011). Factors such as “related videos” contribute highly to how videos can gain the most views. Search referrers are the largest factor in why videos gain views (Figueiredo, Benevenuto, & Almeida, 2011). The internal algorithms of YouTube are the reason why videos can become popular. The main goal for YouTube is to get users to watch more videos for a longer amount of time thus increasing the number of advertisements watched (Cooper, 2019). The YouTube internal algorithm looks at many different aspects of a YouTuber’s videos such as retention rate, consistency of uploads, Key Performance Indicators (likes, dislikes, shares), how new a video is, etc (Cooper, 2019). This plethora of information can hurt or hinder how much a YouTuber’s video is recommended to viewers. This tracking of popularity helps signify which YouTuber can become profitable. This can be

bad and good for Pewdiepie. Seeing as he is the top YouTuber, it is more likely that his videos become recommendations for viewers at a more constant rate. However, it also means that there is an internal algorithm that may choose to work against him for reasons such as his swearing that makes him less brand friendly. With the “Googlization” of YouTube, this large media conglomerate seeks to “extract value” in an “effort to exploit digital audience labor” (Nixon, 2016). This means that Google can generate revenue from YouTube through the use of advertising. YouTubers may receive a portion of this revenue if there are no copyright infringements (Nixon, 2016). Those YouTubers with a large number of views are seen as popular which generates attention for profitability. If an industry sees popularity within a YouTuber, they may take a deep interest in monetizing their videos (Kim, 2012). The Googlization of YouTube allows for banners placed in videos as well as playing commercials throughout. The ad revenue is then split between YouTube and the copyright owner (Nixon, 2016). YouTubers can be paid when viewers do things like click on banner ads or watch their ads for longer than 30 seconds without skipping (“How do YouTubers Get Paid?”). It would be beneficial to question Pewdiepie’s viewers if they pay attention to these advertisements to further understand the profitability aspect. Understanding the concept of popularity leading to profitability helps apply this concept to Pewdiepie.

With Pewdiepie, several factors lead to gaining more publicity. Controversy is a big one when it comes to the number one YouTuber in the world. His most notable event happened in 2017 when he paid “two people in India to hold up a sign that read “death to all Jews.” (Randell, 2019). Another figure dressed as Jesus and was told to defend Hitler’s actions (Perez, 2017). In response to

that video, many endorsers dropped deals with the YouTuber including Disney. The second season of his YouTube Red show, “Scare Pewdiepie”, was cancelled as a result to the controversy as well (Perez, 2017). Google even removed advertising from the video. It seemed like Pewdiepie could not recover from it. He was slowly distancing himself from that controversy when he made another mistake later that year by using the n-word in a live stream. It all seemed to be pointing downward for Pewdiepie but he was able to hold on to his ranking. Though controversy temporarily lowered his subscriber count, it ultimately helped in viewership as his name was constantly spread across social media platforms. Pewdiepie spent the next couple of years distancing himself from his series of controversial actions. His efforts include making an apology video where he tells his audience that he “disappointed in himself” and “there are no excuses [for his behavior]” (Hern, 2017). These apology videos allow for the viewer to decide whether they forgive the offender and in turn can create a stronger Parasocial relationship when fans decide to defend the YouTuber’s actions. In 2019, Felix Kjellberg revealed that he and his girlfriend, Marzia Bisognin, had gotten married which led to more positive publicity which is an example of how harmless news can also create more popularity (Randell). Subscribers who have followed Pewdiepie for many years can feel a strong connection to a couple that they have seen grown together. Ultimately, Pewdiepie’s relatability, controversy, masculinity, and humor all add to his popularity. His popularity creates more views which indicates more sales and thus a higher level of profitability. As of 2019, Pewdiepie’s channel has averaged more than 8 million views every day and, in one month, he can make up to 1 million dollars (Social Blade, 2019). By viewing his statistics on his YouTube summary, it becomes clear that the higher

Pewdiepie’s views increase, the more subscribers he attains. The more videos he uploads, the more money he is making (Social Blade, 2019).

Popularity is a defining term used when a creator has a high number of views and therefore the greatest number of subscribers. The most popular YouTuber to date is Pewdiepie. HMT helps to explain how Pewdiepie has sustained such relevance and popularity within the male-dominated gamer industry. Inclusive Masculinities Theory (IMT) explains how he can also appeal to broader demographics of YouTube users. This all leads to Pewdiepie being able to create a strong Parasocial Relationship as explained by the Parasocial Interaction Theory. It becomes easier to create a full context of who Pewdiepie is as an influencer as well as why he has been able to gain such popularity. Felix Kjellberg has been able to create this online persona of Pewdiepie to become a mediating figure with his subscribers. Pewdiepie’s use of curse words, display of his romantic relationship, and consistent posting allow his viewers to create a Parasocial relationship. On the other hand, through means of his more controversial affairs—such as exclaiming derogatory terms—Pewdiepie has gained infamy which ultimately leads to more views and thus more popularity. Though there has not been much research in terms of the relationship between popularity and profitability, it becomes easy to see a correlation to how Pewdiepie’s high subscriber count and viewership leads to big brand deals and high advertising revenue.

Research Question

What are the factors that lead to Pewdiepie’s popularity? What is the relationship between his popularity and profitability?

Factors that lead to popularity refer to certain characteristics of Pewdiepie that

makes him more likable. It's helpful to know if his sense of humor, Swedish background, his laugh, or any other features make Pewdiepie a popular YouTuber. Is he popular because he is likable or rather because he is controversial? The factors that lead to popularity will be the independent variable. This list of factors is the genetic makeup of popularity that will ultimately lead to profitability: the dependent variable. Profitability refers to the amount of money that one person can make based on their work. In this case, profitability is a term that directly links to Pewdiepie's revenue stream. Is Pewdiepie the highest-paid YouTuber? Is he able to make money due to his factors of popularity? Because Pewdiepie is a part of a rare breed of YouTubers that uploads every day, I suspect his consistency of video uploads will be a large factor of his popularity. I also expect to find that the more popular Pewdiepie is, the higher his profitability will be due to more viewers interacting with his monetized videos and ads.

Method

Research Design

To investigate the factors that contribute to Pewdiepie's popularity and profitability, an online survey was conducted through Qualtrics.com. The survey method allows for wide online distribution to specifically Pewdiepie viewers. Other research designs requiring in-person testing are impractical for this study, as Pewdiepie viewers are a demographic defined only by their online activity and no geographical or physical traits. Locating and testing Pewdiepie fans online is the only feasible method that allows for a meaningful sample size. Surveys also allow for significant data to be quickly compiled and compared.

Survey questions allow for the testing of what key factors relate to Pewdiepie's popularity and profitability. Humor, controversy,

masculinity, cursing, skill at video games, consistency of uploads, and Parasocial Interaction theory were identified as potential factors of popularity to be tested through questioning. Purchasing or desiring merchandise, paying attention to advertisements, purchasing or desiring endorsed products, and sharing Pewdiepie content with others were identified as potential factors of profitability to be tested in the survey. The factors identified as contributing to profitability will impact Pewdiepie's popularity as well due to their positive correlation.

Sampling and Procedure

The survey was distributed across YouTube comments, Instagram, and Reddit targeting Pewdiepie subscribers or heavy viewers (at least once a week). Pewdiepie's channel was created in 2010; his popularity and social relevance has grown substantially over the last decade. Because he has been considered the most subscribed to individual YouTuber--or at least competing for that top rank--for so long, traces of his followers' activity are visible across the web. Thus, we sought to collect data from this population of Pewdiepie's followers. It did not make sense for us to question consumers who don't know about Pewdiepie or perhaps don't care about him, because that doesn't help to signify what factors make Pewdiepie appealing or popular. For these purposes, the logical solution is to take an expert sample. Experts, in this case, are subscribers or viewers who watch Pewdiepie at least once a week. By posting in the YouTube comment section, we aimed to target experts watching new or old videos of Pewdiepie's. Reddit is a platform created solely for the purpose of allowing opinionated users to share their opinions. Because of this, it is easy to find those passionate experts of Pewdiepie by finding subreddits that speak specifically about him. Finally, it is even more

apparent which Instagram users are Pewdiepie experts; if one is willing to run their own Pewdiepie-related fan account with the sole purpose of posting about his videos and life, then they are experts on the topic of Pewdiepie.

To entice Pewdiepie viewers to take the survey, comedic comments were left that sought to match the humor of Kjellberg. One such comment was: “Do NOT Take This Survey! 99% of People can’t complete this Pewdiepie survey for a university study.” To avoid being marked as spam, multiple comments were constructed to leave on differing YouTube videos including; “University Students NEED Responses to This Pewdiepie Survey! Please, PLEASE, click the link!”; “Are you a Pewdiepie Fan? Do you call yourself a gamer? Prove it. Take this survey.” and; “Good morning, gamers. This Pewdiepie survey is for a university study. Please, for the love of God, click the link.” The survey was posted on eleven of Pewdiepie’s recent videos from October and November 2019.

When messaging fan accounts on Instagram, messages were tailored to be friendly and personable: “Hello! I’m doing a research project on Pewdiepie and would be so grateful if you completed this survey for me! And maybe even let your followers know about it. Thanks!” The message was sent to more than 54 fan accounts, one of which posted the survey link on her story. Creating personable messages was done to convince participants that the study was legitimate and nonthreatening.

Lastly, the survey was attempted to be distributed on Reddit. The most popular subreddit for Pewdiepie, r/PewdiepieSubmissions, does not allow links to be included in posts which made accessing their subreddit user base impossible. Another subreddit for Pewdiepie, r/Pewdiepie, marked the post as spam due to the link being included which resulted in Reddit being

abandoned as a source of participants for the study.

In total, 60 survey responses were recorded. Two participants did not complete every question, resulting in some total scores being out of 59 or 58 participants. Data was stored on Qualtrics.com and analyzed through Microsoft Excel. Researchers analyzed the data for trends, themes, means, differences, frequencies, and anomalies. No data was discarded, but profanity was censored. Questions started from a broad lens asking how often participants consumed YouTube content. The survey then asked about the participants’ experience and interest in Pewdiepie’s specific channel with the intent to find the factors that lead to his popularity. It then ended with questions that questioned the expert population about their interactions with advertisements and merchandise with the intent of finding what leads to profitability.

Instrument

Initial questions were designed to validate the credentials of participants as Pewdiepie subscribers or consistent viewers (at least once a week). Likert scale questions were crafted to investigate the factors that contribute to Pewdiepie’s popularity. The statements “I like when Pewdiepie curses” and “Pewdiepie has many masculine traits” were indented to directly verify if Fägersten and Maloney et. al respectively were correct in their hypotheses that these elements contribute to Pewdiepie’s large following. Other statements such as “I watch Pewdiepie because he is funny”; “I watch Pewdiepie because he is good at video games”; and “I like that Pewdiepie uploads every day” were made to gauge whether humor, skill at video games, and consistency of uploads relates to why participants watch and subscribe to Pewdiepie (popularity). Several questions were distributed specifically to investigate the

profitability of Pewdiepie. Participants were asked if they have bought Pewdiepie merchandise or a product he endorses. They were also asked if they pay attention to YouTube ads on Pewdiepie videos. Lastly, questions were posed that aimed to understand if the YouTube community surrounding Pewdiepie encourages his popularity through online discussion. Participants answered if they would share a Pewdiepie video with a friend, if they create internet posts concerning Pewdiepie, and if they have their own YouTube channels with a following.

Findings & Analysis

As of December 1, 2019, the survey that was distributed to Pewdiepie experts had a total of 50 participants. The survey was re-released for a week and was closed again on March 1, 2020. Of the total 60 participants, 2 of the participants did not fully complete the entire survey which will affect the data. The survey data shows that 91.53% ($M = 1.12$, $SD = .42$) of the participants watch YouTube every day with another 8.47% watching anywhere from one to four times a week. 54 of the 60 participants (90%) were subscribed to Pewdiepie's channel. 49.15% claim to watch Pewdiepie every day while 25.42% watch him 2-4 times a week. The study supports the notion that followers like Pewdiepie's humor and his consistency, while simultaneously indicating that the survey successfully captured an expert sample group, of whom watch Pewdiepie frequently. 67.24% strongly like that he uploads every day. 61.02% of participants strongly agree with the statement, "I watch Pewdiepie because he is funny." Moreover, 62.71% at least somewhat agreed with the statement that they feel like they personally know Pewdiepie. This statement helps to support the idea that Parasocial Interaction Theory contributes greatly to Pewdiepie's popularity. The survey

data for these three factors is the most significant. Additionally, 59.32% ($M = 4.93$, $SD = 1.49$) of participants at least somewhat agreed with the fact that they felt that Pewdiepie exhibited masculine traits, which Connell's Inclusive Masculinities Theory could attribute to his popularity, but only 13.56% strongly agreed with that statement.

Another interesting statistic points to the positive effect of Marzia, Pewdiepie's wife, and her involvement with the videos. 56.9% of participants at least somewhat agreed that they are more likely to watch a Pewdiepie video if Marzia is in it. Many of the Instagram accounts that were direct messaged were fan accounts for both Pewdiepie and Marzia, as these two often are seen as a package deal. Based on the responses, many of Marzia's fan accounts are young females and that demographic was more willing to participate in the survey. This helps to explain the positive response to Marzia. However, Pewdiepie's relationship displayed normally on screen adds to the Parasocial Interaction Theory. By normalizing the appearances of his girlfriend-turned-wife, Pewdiepie can create a comfortable and personal atmosphere on his channel. It most likely also allows him to reach out to a larger fanbase such as the younger female demographic that was willing to participate in this survey.

In addition to highlighting contributing factors, the survey also disproved factors that have not seemed to play any significant role in Pewdiepie's popularity. Only 32.2% of participants at least somewhat thought Pewdiepie is controversial signaling that it is not a contributor to his popularity. Other factors mentioned in the survey that did not hold significant relevance to this study include the fact that 56.9% of participants at least somewhat like when Pewdiepie curses suggesting that this may be a contributor to his popularity and that Kristy Fägersten's research is valid. Our study at the

very least confirms that cursing is not necessarily a hindrance to a YouTube channel's popularity with 31.03% not having an opinion on swearing and only 12.07% at least somewhat disliking it. 39.66% said that they somewhat agree that they watch Pewdiepie because he is good at video games but the rest of the results were distributed somewhat evenly ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. These statistics show important components that explain why Pewdiepie is popular. This data shows that those who have subscribed to Pewdiepie and watch him regularly do so primarily because they find him to be funny, they can enjoy new content every day and they feel as though they know Pewdiepie personally. As shown in Table 1 and 2 are Likert scale responses which allowed survey participants to express their reasoning for being invested in Pewdiepie.

Seventy percent of participants interact with other Pewdiepie subscribers on social media platforms. 62.71% make social media posts about Pewdiepie on sites other than YouTube. 61.02% would share a Pewdiepie video on social media. These statistics show how Pewdiepie's popularity leads to the creation of a community amongst his subscribers. A YouTube personality that people are willing to talk about shows popularity but it also shows a potential for profitability. Though it is more difficult to make conclusions about the profitability aspect of the reading questions, there are key points to highlight. Although 71.19% of participants have never purchased Pewdiepie merchandise, 83.05% say that they would be willing to purchase merchandise in the future. Based on this finding, a new question must be asked; what is the bridge between a potential buyer and an actual customer when it comes to Pewdiepie merchandise? It is more difficult to create a merchandise customer, but viewers can contribute to profitability in other ways. YouTubers that monetize their videos can be

paid when viewers do things like watch full ads or for longer than 30 seconds (if it is a longer ad). According to the participants, 74.58% ($M = 2.12$, $SD = .61$) at least sometimes pay attention to ads on Pewdiepie's videos. By paying attention and fully watching Pewdiepie's ads, these participants can greatly be contributing to the profitability of his videos.

Discussion & Conclusion

Maloney, Roberts, & Caruso found that Pewdiepie was popular because of Hegemonic Masculinities Theory in tandem with Inclusive Masculinities Theory (2018). About 59.32% of participants at least somewhat agreed that Pewdiepie has many masculine traits while another 27.12% could neither agree nor disagree. A threat to reliability is the nature of the question. Not many people will likely be willing to answer thoughtfully to questions like, "Does Pewdiepie have masculine traits?" or "is Pewdiepie controversial?". Nevertheless, it is imperative to note the 59% of participants who do see Pewdiepie's contributions to Hegemonic Masculinities Theory (HMT). As of 2015, males dominated the platform of gaming viewer demographics with a makeup of 80% (Maloney, Roberts, & Caruso, 2018). Pewdiepie is a gamer who curses constantly and will make sexually explicit jokes; he encompasses the very characteristics that encourage a hypermasculine setting. However, looking at the Inclusive Masculinities Theory, it can be seen that Pewdiepie perhaps uses these masculine traits to create a more inclusive setting. The presence of his wife, Marzia, ensures a more playful and inclusive atmosphere. As shown from the survey, 56.9% of participants at least somewhat agreed that they are more likely to watch a video if Marzia is in the video. On May 25, 2019, Pewdiepie posted a video titled, "I brought back Marzia for this" referring to the fact that

within the past few months Marzia has been noticeably absent from his videos. The video accumulated more than 6 million views which is astonishing considering the purely advertising content. Essentially, the video is a nearly 8- minute video sponsored by the app, Archero, to promote their mobile game. One of the top comments read, “8 minutes ad that people actually watch. That’s how marzia works”. The inclusivity and presence of a female figure allow for Pewdiepie to relate to a broader audience while also making him seem more appealing as a man in a multicultural, happy relationship. Fägersten’s work cited Pewdiepie’s excessive use of curse words as one of the greatest reasons why he is popular which coincides with 56.9% of participants that could at least somewhat agree to liking when Pewdiepie uses curse words (2017). Once again, both masculinity and cursing could be hard topics to ask participants to be honest about which could affect the reliability of the question. However, since there is a majority that like Pewdiepie’s use of curse words, it is important to consider this. Fägersten believes that the excessive use of curse words helps to create a very comfortable setting amongst Pewdiepie and his viewers that is often only felt amongst friends (2017). The effective use of cursing adds to the Parasocial Interaction Theory that allows Pewdiepie to create such a strong relationship with his viewers.

The findings for Pewdiepie’s controversiality were notable. Only 32.2% even somewhat agreed that Pewdiepie is controversial. Not one person strongly agreed with this notion which is surprising but also understandable. Not many people want to admit that they willingly support someone who has made anti-semitic jokes or blurts out racist slurs. Even credible sources such as the New York Times have written about Pewdiepie’s controversial behavior stating that he is “embraced by the far right” while

listing his ill-mannered past such as: using derogatory terms to refer to female gamer, Natalia Mogollon, and uttering the “n-word” online (Chokshi, 2019). Nevertheless, with such a small percentage of Pewdiepie experts only somewhat agreeing with the notion that Pewdiepie is controversial suggests that controversiality does not affect the popularity of a YouTuber. The validity of this finding is questionable as this could also point to the possibility that users are willing to overlook and justify Pewdiepie’s offensive behavior because he is likable due to other personality aspects. This research shows that while Pewdiepie’s controversial behavior may not add to his popularity, it also does not hurt it.

Recruitment proved to be difficult as we failed to ask the participants through which platform they found the link. This could have been beneficial in clarifying which platform was the most effective in terms of recruitment. However, targeting Instagram accounts that consistently interact with their followers seems to be a very effective means of sampling and was further pursued for the final data collection. Ultimately the main components—as found from this survey—which create Pewdiepie’s popularity (i.e. his humor, consistent posting, Parasocial relationships) coincide with our initial expectations. With these results, we are further able to create a clearer relationship between Popularity and Profitability. One conclusive point that was found through the sampling process is that a viewer does not guarantee a customer. Though the purchasing of merchandise is not the only way in which to measure profitability, it is a simple way of observing clear patterns. It certainly takes more effort to create a customer of Pewdiepie merchandise rather than just a fan, as it does for consumers of any product. It can be concluded that there are several missing factors to take into consideration such as financial background, fashion sense, frugality,

etc. However, Pewdiepie's profitability can be measured through other means such as the level by which viewers pay attention to the ads in his videos. 61% of participants pay attention to Pewdiepie's ads sometimes while 13.56% answered that they always pay attention. Apply these percentages to Pewdiepie's 102 million subscribers and that creates a sizable ad revenue. It can be seen that Pewdiepie's high levels of popularity as seen in his subscriber count translate to a higher level of profitability. The more subscribers and viewers that Pewdiepie has, the more people who are viewing his monetized ads, sponsorships, buying merchandise, and more. It is interesting to note that only about 27% of participants had actually bought merchandise. This makes sense when 27% of 100 million subscribers equates to 27 million consumers buying sweatshirts, t-shirts, etc. However, this number may also pertain to any number of smaller YouTubers. This consumer behavior suggests that 27% of a given population are willing to make a monetary investment in a parasocial relationship. While this is not the only way in which YouTubers make a sizable profit, this research shows that only a small percentage of viewers need to actively invest in a YouTuber's merchandise. Rather, a viewer contributes greatly to a YouTuber's profit every time they watch a 30-second ad without skipping, click on a banner ad, watch a sponsored video, use a promo code, and more. As of March 2019, a sponsored video on Pewdiepie's channel could cost up to \$450,000 (Chokshi, 2019). YouTubers, like Pewdiepie, are able to gain millions of dollars based more on a viewers' on-platform engagement rather than their active consumer behavior.

Topics that can be explored in the future include why many participants say they have not bought Pewdiepie merchandise (71.19%) but 83% of participants said that they would be willing. What is the factor that leads

to Pewdiepie fans who say they would be open to buying merchandise and those who actually do make the purchase? Due to timing constraints, it was not possible to develop analyses and implement specific theories unto various genres of Pewdiepie's videos. However, one can further apply theories such as HMT, IMT, and Parasocial Interactions theory to different types of Pewdiepie videos (i.e. Let's Play, Reaction videos, Reddit Review).

This research is important because Pewdiepie is one of the most influential online figures who has fans that span across multiple generations. Though Pewdiepie may not always be the #1 YouTuber (in terms of subscribers), the patterns of what makes a social media influencer popular and profitable may be applied to other online personalities. It is important not only to the field of communications but also to industries like advertising and marketing who may fail to understand why consumers have the potential to be loyal to a brand. Furthermore, this research shows the varying aspects of why controversial influencers can remain relevant and highly popular despite offensive or bad behavior: whether it be due to relatability or by showing a clear portrayal of regret via apology videos. Pewdiepie's constant posting about relevant and modern content allows him to strengthen this bond between him and his subscriber base. He is able to sustain sentiment and support because he effectively humanizes himself through his lack of gamer expertise, foul language, wife, and more. Beyond that, Pewdiepie is resiliently popular because he becomes a familiar figure to his viewers who are more willing to forgive his shortcomings. After all, friends are more willing to understand and forgive the insolent behavior of their own friends.

This research indicates that there are certain factors that YouTubers need in order to create a parasocial relationship with their

viewers in order to increase popularity. An important factor to note for marketers is that a popular influencer needs passive engagement (watching ads, etc.) while only needing to sell merchandise to about 27% of their fanbase in order to produce a sizable profit. Finally, all of these factors indicate

how a popular YouTuber/influencer can become a character of resilience in the ever-changing landscape of social media. The gaming industry has become one of the most profitable industries in the past decade and Pewdiepie is a representation of that growth and resilience.

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Appendix

Survey Results (CSV): For those interested in full survey data, they can be accessed here: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/19-UD2416ehFXv37so7CdZrYSipX7xC6T/edit#gid=1505518817>

The Rhetoric Surrounding Mary Cain

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Written for: ENG 418: Rhetoric and Theory (Dr. David Holmes)

The Rhetoric Surrounding Mary Cain

Ambitious, bread-winner, strong, and emotionally-controlled. These are adjectives that typically allude to the image of a male. Whereas: attractive, nurturing, personable, and home-maker are adjectives typically associated with females. This is because gender, different from sex, is an outward performance (Halberstam, 2019) while sex is the physiological assignment of a person (Fixmer-Oraiz and Wood, 2019). Although it is arbitrary to confine these performances and personal attributes to one gender, society tends to construct distinct images of masculinity and femininity. For example, strength is often associated with masculinity, causing female athletes to experience conflict between their biological sex and gender performance. This is why female athletes are often characterized by their female masculinity, a term coined for women who naturally embody strength and other masculine attributes without intentionally trying to imitate maleness (Sloop, 2004). In the case of professional runner Mary Cain, her own female masculinity, caused her to function as an aberration from society, thus falling into what Judith Butler calls “gender trouble”, or irregularity in gender performance (1999). Cain’s conflicting identity as both female and athlete caused her to suffer under a masculine power structure. Her story is important as it highlights a present struggle that many female athletes face.

For the purposes of a rhetorical study, it is important to discuss rhetoric in the context of this societal problem. Rhetoric can be defined on a smaller scale as “the study of effective speaking and writing, the art of persuasion” (The Forest of Rhetoric, 2016). On a larger scale rhetoric is “the entire range of resources that human beings possess to produce effects on others” (Lipson and Binkley, 2009), and is appearing everywhere, “ubiquitous” (Mailloux, 2008). There are many different facets through which rhetoric can be used for persuasion, and one prevalent example in this study is the practice of rituals. Through his analysis of rituals carried out in Ancient Near East civilizations, professor of Religion at Syracuse University, James Watts, defines ritual rhetoric as statements that invoke repeated behaviors that become common practice and yield powers to dominant institutions (Watts in Lipson and Binkley, 2009). This is important in the sports realm, as there exist common practices that cycle power back to males. Furthermore, rhetorician, Mari Lee Mifsud considers the art of rhetoric through storytelling and claims rhetoric to be epistemic, thus having the power to create realities that shape how people view the world (Mifsud in Lipson and Binkley, 2009). This is important to this specific case, as rhetoric was used to empower dominant systems and hide the realities of subordinate groups.

Finally, it is essential to consider the rhetorical refusal, or rhetoric that intentionally deviates from the norm (Schillb, 2007). As seen in this study, the rhetorical

Terminology and Background

refusal becomes an essential part of taking down dominant power groups.

Through ritual rhetoric, it is evident that rhetoric can bolster a power cycle. Similarly, doxa, from the Greek term doxastic, often functions to perpetuate dominant powers as well. In his rhetorical study, *Disciplining Gender*, communication scholar, John Sloop, defines doxa as the public opinion or common sense as created through the public discourse (2004). In his study on how gender is talked about, Sloop discovered through his analysis of media that doxa typically supports the gender binary system, hence supporting the existing, dominant structure. All forms of media (news, social media outlets, television, etc.) play an important role in society because they function to decide and transmit what is valuable (McChesney, 2015). An example of the importance of media is seen through the #MeToo movement, a social media movement in which women were able to share their sexual assault experiences with the #MeToo (Taylor, 2019). The #MeToo movement serves as a precursor and event for comparison to the movement surrounding Mary Cain. The way in which the community surrounds each movement is similar in response and style.

Finally, it is important to understand the concept of hegemony, which is the power of one group to dominate over all others (Messerschmidt, 2019). Mike Donaldson, professor from University of Wollongong in Australia, explains that if hegemony is a dominant group demonstrating superiority over a subordinate group, then hegemonic masculinity is the objectification, belittling, and sexualization of females by males, thus diminishing the power and presence of females and making the male ideology ubiquitous (2019). University of Sydney Australia professor, R.W. Connell calls it any practices that legitimize and maintain masculine dominance (2005). This is

important for the case of Mary Cain because the female athlete is in a system that is structured for and dominated by men. However, it is important to note that hegemonic masculinity is not synonymous with misogyny, which is active hatred of women (Wood, Fixmer-Oraiz, 2017). In the case of Mary Cain, the coaches do not hate her, but they still use rhetoric in a way that diminishes her.

The Story

On November seventh of 2019, Mary Cain shared her story. Cain was a long-distance running prodigy. At seventeen, she was the youngest athlete (out of both males and females) to ever make a world-championship track meet. Her skill awarded her attention from Alberto Salazar, coach of the world-famous Nike Oregon Project track team. In 2013, she joined Salazar's team not only with lofty personal aspirations, but with high expectations from those in the track and field community.

However, after failing to meet the expectations, Cain fell off the grid. On November 7th of 2019, she shared her struggle with the world via The New York Times. In the article titled, "I Was the Fastest Girl in America, Until I Joined Nike", Cain details the pressure she endured in the "win-at-all-costs" culture to be constantly losing weight. Coach Alberto Salazar always made her feel inadequate and ashamed of her body. He blamed all of her losses on her weight, and no one stood up to help her in this struggle. Cain details that she began to cut herself and have suicidal thoughts during her time training with Nike. She explains that she told colleagues about these harmful actions and thoughts, but no one did anything to help her. After years of this torment and self-injury, Cain walked away from the Nike Oregon Project. She is now sharing her story

with the rest of the world, and finding that many other female athletes can relate.

Nike did issue a response in which they apologized for the way that Cain felt she had been treated. However, in their apology Nike addressed that Cain asked to come back and train with the Oregon Project again, thus proving that the conditions she faced could not have been as bad as her story says. Other athletes, such as Tianna Bartoletta, were quick to harp on Nike's response, arguing that it was not an apology. Bartoletta is also a professional track and field athlete in the long jump. She keeps a blog and wrote a response to Cain's story titled, "Being Mary Cain". In this, Bartoletta thoroughly outlines the cycle of abuse, being a domestic abuse victim herself. She points out that Cain's desire to return to the Oregon Project is a natural part of the cycle of abuse in which victims often return to the perpetrator.

Overall, Cain's story received a plethora of responses and support, particularly from other athletes, but also from fans and social media users. Her story is a powerful rhetorical movement against an abusive culture.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

This study explores two hypotheses and two research questions. The first hypothesis is: (H1) through ritual rhetoric that enhances hegemonic masculinity, coaches are able to shame the bodies of female athletes without repercussions. The second hypothesis is: (H2) those in the inferior position of power must wait for the appropriate cultural moment to share a story that attacks those in power. The first research question asks, (R1) what constitutes the appropriate cultural moment to share a story that attacks hegemonic powers? Finally, the second research question seeks to understand the results of sharing such a story, asking (R2) what kind of responses does the story receive?

Hegemonic Masculinity and Ritual Practices

Sports are a specific setting in which masculine practices have always flourished. Being that the initial participants in sports were all males and that males have traditionally been at the forefront of athletics (through media, news, and other forms of doxa) this is a setting in which hegemonic masculinity can thrive (Connell, 2005). This is exemplified in Mary Cain's article when she discusses the athletic standards for women that are based on male development, "A big part of this problem is that women and girls are being forced to meet athletic standards that are based on how men and boys develop. If you try to make a girl fit a boy's development timeline, her body is at risk of breaking down" (2019). Cain's statement demonstrates that before even getting to the root of the problem of weight and body-shaming, the athletic system is already isolating females by pushing an agenda centered around males.

On top of an already flawed system, there are three ritual practices that Cain discusses in her article. The first is the ritual of weighing teammates in front of each other. As part of his regimen, head coach, Alberto Salazar, routinely made his athletes stand on a scale to be weighed in front of their teammates. Additionally, when an athlete did not perform well, Salazar blamed her performance on previous weigh-ins. This can be characterized as ritual rhetoric because it is a repeated practice used to legitimize those in positions of authority: coaches. As film theorist, Viola Shafik, points out in *Rituals of Hegemonic Masculinity*, the sexualization and subordination of the female body is a ritualized practice in all media outlets that perpetuates the problem in areas outside of the media (2012). Since media functions to transmit values into society (McChesney, 2015) this process becomes normalized and unquestionable. This normalization allows

coaches, like Salazar, to get away with these harmful ritual practices without consequence. The second ritual practice imposed by Alberto Salazar was his way of constantly reminding his athletes how lucky they are to be a part of his team. Cain explains that anytime she or other athletes complained or even asked a question about their training, Salazar took it as a personal attack and scolded them for their ungratefulness. Perhaps this should have been a hindrance to trusting Salazar. However, this is a message that high-level athletes have received since a young age. Thus the rhetoric of ungratefulness and disdain that Salazar used was particularly salient to the athletes, and they accepted the burden as their own instead of further questioning his coaching. This repeated ritual rhetoric not only works to enhance the power that Salazar possessed, but also functions to silence the marginalized group, a factor that Donaldson identifies as a key factor of hegemonic masculinity (2019).

The final ritual practice that Cain discusses is that of abuse, or what she calls: the “destruction of self”. Cain realizes, “I was the victim of an abusive system, an abusive man. I was constantly tormented by the conflict of wanting to be free from him and wanting to go back to the way things used to be, when I was his favorite.” (2019). Through Salazar’s process of shaming and silencing, in collaboration with reward in moments of success, his female athletes are put in a vulnerable mental state. Sexual violence expert, Pauline Fuller, points out that it is through the construction of masculinity as dominant that enables men to abuse women (verbally, emotionally, and sexually) (1996). It is not a natural desire, but rather comes from a greed for power and control. This idea is perpetuated by Nike’s “apology” to Cain’s article, in which Nike asserts that Cain wanted to come back to train with Salazar again. However, as pointed out by fellow

professional track and field athlete, Tianna Bartoletta returning to the perpetrator is a part of the cycle of abuse (2019). In her blog post that responded to Cain’s article, Bartoletta thoroughly outlines the cycle of abuse, as a victim herself. As highlighted in this cycle, after the abuse, there is usually a lull, or “honeymoon phase”, which provides the illusion that things are better, and the victim would feel comfortable returning (Johnson, 2006). Hence, why Cain considered going back to Nike.

These ritual practices of hegemonic masculinity proved extremely detrimental not only to Cain’s physical health but also to her overall well-being. In her early twenties, Cain was diagnosed with osteoporosis and had a high risk of infertility. Furthermore, Cain began to see herself as utterly unworthy as she continued to perform poorly and Salazar continued to berate her for the size of her body. Cain explains that she started to cut herself and even when she told other colleagues, no one did anything about it. She felt trapped in a system and because no one spoke up, she continued to believe that it was her fault. When there is a hegemonic power in place, even those with some authority will not question that power, and thus the power continues to be put in the hands of the dominant group (Donaldson, 2019). Which supports that it is necessary for there to be a particular cultural moment in which the hegemonic power is weakened in order for a change to be made.

The Cultural Moment

Critiquing, usurping, or taking away power from the dominant group is a difficult task. As seen in Cain’s case, even when she told other people (including assistant coaches) that she was hurting herself and having suicidal thoughts, no one intervened. Not only would it be challenging to actually create change, but also through the ritual

practices, power was continually cycled back to the dominant group. Thus, it seems essential that there be some other, most likely larger, factor that weakens the dominant power group. An example comes from Rachael Denhollander, a former U.S. National Team gymnast who sparked the story about sexual assault cases tied to her former coach and physician, Larry Nassar. Nassar sexually assaulted hundreds of girls in his more than twenty years working for the U.S.A. Gymnastics (USAG) Team. However, Denhollander had to wait sixteen years for the right cultural moment to share her assault story. When she initially tried to seek help at just seventeen years old, no one believed her nor wanted to do anything about it because of the established power systems. However, in 2016, an article was released that generally discussed sexual assault within the USAG organization. It was then that Denhollander determined she could credibly share her story (Denhollander, 2019).

Similarly to Denhollander, no one stepped up to support Mary Cain initially, but when the hegemonic powers were already threatened, her story gained credibility. She writes, “Last month, after the doping report dropped that led to his suspension, I felt this quick and sudden release. That helped me understand that this system is not O.K. That’s why I decided to speak up now.” (2019). Cain waited until Salazar was already weakened because of a doping report which cultivated the appropriate moment for her to share her story and receive support. When seeking out what is the ideal cultural moment, often the group in power must already be suffering from some sort of attack from another higher power group, such as the law.

An important concept in regards to the cultural moment is the rhetorical refusal, defined as “an act of writing or speaking in which the rhetor pointedly refuses to do what the audience considers rhetorically normal”

(Schillb, 2007). Many point to work done in the sixties by civil rights activist, Malcolm X, as an example of a rhetorical refusal. Scholar Scott Varda, claims that Malcolm X’s use of rhetoric that was often seen as “harsh” toward white people, was indeed a rhetorical refusal because it intentionally went against the cultural norm and challenged the dominant group (2011). In the same way, a story like Cain’s is an example of a rhetorical refusal because the audience does not perceive female athletes to be malnourished or worrying about their weight, rather they are perceived as brave and strong women. However, the truth diverts from the audience’s expectations of what is rhetorically normal, thus constituting a rhetorical refusal. In all, the appropriate cultural moment occurs in conjunction with the rhetorical refusal in order to effectively bring about change for marginalized groups.

The Reaction

Tianna Bartoletta’s blog post was one of the larger responses to Cain’s article, however there was a plethora more. Dozens of female athletes responded to Cain via Twitter by sharing her article, sharing support, and some even shared their own experiences with body shaming in the running industry. Some came from Salazar’s team and others from different levels. For example, runner for Under Armor, Rachel Schneider responded via Twitter saying, “We NEED to learn from this. We all need to do better” (2019). Runner Emma Kertesz tweeted about an arbitrary height and weight system her previous coach used to determine ideal race weight, claiming that she felt healthiest and fastest when she did workouts well, ate and slept (2019). Another one of Alberto Salazar’s former athletes, Yoder Begley, even came out with her own article in which she details Salazar’s ridiculing of her body.

Cain's story also elicited many responses from male athletes who shared the article and declared their support for Cain and others. It even evoked responses from former coaches who apologized for not knowing or not doing anything about the harmful situation. Specifically, her former coach, Cam Levins, remorsefully states via Twitter that he wishes he could have been the person looking out for Cain (2019). Other coaches claimed that the system is flawed and when they were in it, it was hard to see any way out of it; providing yet another example of how hegemonic masculinity was difficult to break down in this ritual rhetoric case.

This kind of a response is not unique to Cain's situation, rather when the cultural moment presents itself and one attacks the positions of power, it seems to act as a catalyst for many more voices to come forward and share their experiences. This was seen in Rachael Denhollander's case, as her accusal allowed for many other gymnasts to step up and share their own abuse stories related to Nassar. Similarly was the #MeToo movement. The #MeToo movement started in late October of 2017 when Harvey Weinstein was under fire for sexual assault cases. Actress, Alyssa Milano, tweeted about her assault experience and called others to share theirs with the #MeToo. Within a year, the #MeToo had over twelve million posts (Taylor, 2019). In her analysis of the movement and its responses, professor of gender and women's studies at the University of California Davis, Joanna Regulska, says that women jumped to "seize this moment of opportunity" -- that was created by the appropriate cultural moment -- in order to create an environment that was conducive to communication and understanding (2018). All it takes is one voice, such as that of Mary Cain, Rachel Denhollander, or Alyssa Milano, at the correct cultural moment to make an

important change and provide a space for others to share their stories.

Implications for Research

Upon considering implications for this research, there are a few ways it could be expanded. First, this research covers feminist movements that specifically attack hegemonic masculinity. However, there are many other marginalized groups in the world. Further research could "size up" and explore people of color or people with disabilities and their rhetorical movements against hegemonic powers, not limited to hegemonic masculinity. Secondly, this research could also "size down" to focus more on women, and specifically female athletes, by examining their voices and rhetorical power in their respective contexts. For example, research could conduct a cross-sport examination to see if weight is a problem in other sports, or discover what types of discrimination other female athletes face. Additionally, it would also be interesting to examine the social media aspect of Cain's movement. How long does a movement with momentum on social media last; does the initial momentum die off? It would be helpful to examine the real and effective changes made by other social media movements. Lastly, the final section of this research on the responses to Cain's article could be expanded to examine the importance of narrative in relation to social change. The research question could seek out whether narrative is a more effective method to evoke social change, rather than another method.

Conclusion

To conclude, the findings of this paper assert that in the case of Mary Cain and the Nike Oregon Project, ritual rhetoric was used to perpetuate an abusive cycle of hegemonic masculinity. Additionally, this paper finds that in order to challenge those in power, the appropriate cultural moment must

take place. This moment is constituted by an existing threat to power and the use of a rhetorical refusal. Lastly, the release of Mary Cain's story at the appropriate time yields an abundance of responses and support, allowing others who have experienced similar trauma to share their stories too.

It is important to realize the practical ways in which conclusions from this research can be used. As David Beard, researcher on ethics, points out in his analysis of the #MeToo movement, it is essential that lessons that empower all genders are placed into the education systems. He asserts that K-12 education systems should not only have sexual harassment education, but that the teaching should attempt to move away from the power

structures that are already in place (2018). As Sloop points out, it is important that humans can come to recognize each other as humans, knowing their own biases, but putting them aside to understand and show respect for people unlike themselves (2004). This seems the most practical takeaway: to know one's self and biases, but to be willing to put them aside and hear others out. Rhetoric has the power to stereotype, marginalize and isolate. However, rhetoric also has the power to create a space for truth, relationship, and equality. It is essential that the rhetoric surrounding female athletes should promote truth by demonstrating the bravery and strength of these hardworking and resilient women.

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Capital Offense: The Rhetorical Importance of Identifiers

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Written for ENG 418: Rhetorical Theory (Dr. David Holmes)

Introduction

Too often, the freedom of Black people to create a cross-culturally acceptable practice is predicated on the existence and recognition of a comparable white practice. Even in something as fluid as language, Black people's expressions of identity are deemed incorrect and out of order until proven acceptable to others. Writer and columnist George M. Johnson released an article in early October 2019 on Mic, a diversity-focused journalism and storytelling platform, describing the importance of capitalizing "Black" in written conversations regarding race. Johnson states, "Capitalization is important because ["Black"] is not just describing the color of skin, or of a car or a desk for that matter. It describes a race — one whose existence has historically been plagued by erasure. Formatting the name of a race accurately, in books, on Twitter, in the media, is a glaring demand for our humanity."

The motivation to address this topic stems from the writing composition controversy of capitalizing the "b" in "Black" when referring to Black people. In traditional American English spelling practices, it is incorrect to capitalize a common noun when the word does not occur at the beginning of a sentence. However, considering that the definition of Black people — which will be contextualized for the purpose of this paper — refers to a formally recognized and named group of people, the term "Black" should be treated as a proper noun. Black writers across various professional fields have received much pushback for choosing to utilize this style technique, with opposing arguments ranging

from being out of line with common style guides to being an unnecessary political statement.

This conversation is much deeper than exploring the limitations of the English language's capitalization guidelines. Abiding by the boundaries of a construct as abstract as language is a choice. In considering the importance of names and identities, however, one must realize the power of being able to choose and control the rhetoric surrounding one's own identity. Capitalizing the "b" in Black, choosing to use the terminology "Black," and even referring to certain generations of Black ancestors using politically correct language speaks to the power of having a say in racial identifiers. This is a right that other groups have robbed from Black people throughout history.

Discussion

In Steven Mailloux's exploration of rhetorical hermeneutics and contingent universals, Mailloux argues that those who engage with rhetoric — which is everyone — must engage with the present truths of their respective time and society. As systems, institutions, and people groups change, tensions arise between what was once rhetorically acceptable and what is presently appropriate in regard to how people reference others or themselves. Scholars refer to these references as "identifiers." Historically, racial identifiers reflect various truths about the respective points in time in which certain terms have been most popular.

Terms of identification are a natural attribute people ascribe to groups of people

based on common characteristics. These terms consist of rhetoric that can be either affirming, neutral, or derogatory, and they exist in the form of words, symbols, caricatures, and even sounds. Oftentimes the dominant groups within a society set the tone for how they address marginalized groups within that same society. There are moments in which the terms that marginalized groups have created for themselves begin to become more prevalent. There are also periods in which marginalized groups reclaim a term that dominant groups once used to describe them, and they redefine the term itself and restrict the terms under which an outsider can use it (Davis 2005).

Identifiers are a key component in understanding the systems of race. Any racial group is difficult to define with a single definition due to the fluid, non-constant construct of race. Historically, Black people have been defined by characteristics such as descendency from the continent of Africa and physical features. Take note of the rhetorical purpose of my passivity in stating what Black people “have been defined by.” In history books, in media, and in political and social discourse, people in control of these systems have dictated the dominant rhetoric that identifies Black people (McGee 1999). Additionally, the terms with which Black people have chosen to identify themselves have not been included in the common language until non-Black people have accredited them. The lack of rhetorical autonomy Black people have had over their identifiers speaks to the greater message of non-Black people having a degree of control over Black identity.

With creating the construct of race, Europeans also generated new rhetoric to support it. As expressions both for and in opposition to the systemic infiltrations of race evolved through different periods of history, so did racial identifiers. Dating back

to when European colonizers first brought enslaved people to the Americas, Black people have received identifying labels created by people other than themselves. George M. Johnson expands on this in his recent Mic article:

Since the very first American census in 1790, Black people’s identity has been left in the hands of white people in power. After that, our identity on the US census changed from “Slaves” (1790) to “black” (1850) to “negro” (1900) to “Negro” (1930) to “Negro or Black” (1970) to “Black or Negro” (1980). The most current iteration is “black, African American or Negro” (1990). Other descriptors have also been used to describe those with Black blood in their body, like “mulatto” (mixed) “quadroon” (1/4th Black), and “octoroon” (1/8th Black). (Johnson 2019) Johnson’s list maintains political correctness and does not include more controversial identifiers used to refer to Black people, nor does it need to. Simply put, Black identifiers have often been in the hands of white people to create and decide. These terms alone rhetorically give context to the periods in which they have been most prevalent and correspond with the most impactful experiences shaping Black identities at given times. At “slaves,” Black people were enslaved. Throughout periods of “black” and “negro,” Black people were second class citizens. The term “African American,” coined and promoted by Reverend Jesse Jackson in 1988, was the first popular identifier fully created by Black people that Black and non-Black people could use in a politically correct manner (Martin 1991).

Additionally, it is important to consider the relationship between identifiers and identity. Rhetorician Krista Ratcliffe describes the pairing as such:

As academic-theory and daily-life examples demonstrate, identification is inextricably linked with identity but does not

directly correspond to it. In other words, although an identification may inform a person's identity, a person's identity cannot be reduced to a single identification. No single identification solely defines a person's identity; he or she is a compilation of many identifications. (Ratcliffe 2005)

Ratcliffe goes on to state that identification impacts how we comprehend constructs and socialization at particular moments in time. Considering this position, identifiers serve as rhetorical expressions of an extension of self. They cannot comprehensively describe a person or a group of people, but they do inform, to a degree, how people have been shaped. An identifier in and of itself gives reference to whom one is addressing and what social confine the person is subject to. With systems and constructs having a significant impact on how people understand the identities of others and shape their own, it is necessary that people have agency in selecting what terms of identification they want over them.

In the era of "black, African American, or Negro," Black people have more opportunities than ever before to create and dictate self-made identifiers. Incorporating these identifiers, however, is the current impediment. Writers such as Nikole Hannah-Jones of the New York Times' 1619 Project have successfully navigated the conversation of intentionally using the term "enslaved people" rather than "slaves" to reframe how readers and listeners think of and acknowledge slavery. Nevertheless, there are also writers such as George M. Johnson who receive editorial harassment for capitalizing the 'b' in "Black." In light of the

rhetoric of identifiers, the strive for standardization of a racial descriptor as a proper noun is more so demand for recognition of Black people's humanity (Johnson 2019).

It has always been true that Black people deserve identifiers created for them and by them. They are not dependent on non-Black people to qualify what identifiers they can use or how they can use them. Nonetheless, it is important that non-Black people use the terminology and its implicit guidelines set forth by Black people when referencing them in order to reinforce the autonomy that groups have to establish and maintain the rhetoric surrounding their own identities.

Conclusion

Considering Mailloux's notion that people should engage with the truths of their environment, it is important that people recognize and incorporate the changing rhetoric of Black racial identifiers. Racial identifiers are a fluid form of rhetoric that often reflects a portion of the historical context in which they originated or popularized. While identifiers do not fully encompass the extent of one's identity, the relationship between identity and terms of identification illuminates certain details regarding the constructs that the subjected person or group belongs to. Marginalized groups often receive identifiers that dominant groups ascribe to them, but it is important and necessary to empower all groups to establish their own identifiers and the criteria by which others can incorporate their terminology.

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Strong, Powerful, *and* Beautiful

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Written for COM 411: Gender and Communication (Dr. Sarah Stone-Watt)

Introduction and Method

"You are strong, you are powerful, and you are beautiful" my mother repeated to me growing up. In any situation: after a race, before a test, on an important day; in all moods and all outcomes, she reminded me that I am all three of those things at once. It created a confidence in me that manifested in the classroom, in athletics, and in leadership roles. Still, it was my athleticism that made me stand out at a young age. I was realized by P.E. teachers, coaches, and my parents; all of whom pushed me to be involved in sports throughout my youth. While I am thankful for the many lessons I have learned through sports, I have also dealt with fifteen years of struggling through what it means to be both a female and an athlete. First I am too small and then I am too big. I need to lift more weight but not act or appear manly. I need to maintain a healthy running weight while eating loads of protein to put on more muscle. The struggle is that I embody female masculinity, which is women performing masculine through dress, stature, attitude, and other facets. (Halberstam, 2019). Female masculinity is not a woman intentionally trying to imitate a man, but it is a woman being who she truly is (2019). Over the past two and a half months, I have analyzed my own performance of female masculinity and my struggle in having strong and powerful mean something different than beautiful. I started my self-analysis by reflecting on specific instances from my childhood that shaped who I am. Then I looked presently at the way I communicate gender in different social groups (athletic and greek life) on

Pepperdine's campus. Additionally, I read through the journals I have kept throughout college to allow me to have deeper insight into my development during my time at Pepperdine. I was careful to analyze gender as an internal personal identity and outward performance, not directly tied to sex (Fixmer-Oraiz, Wood, 2017).

One of the Boys

"You only beat me because I wasn't trying today" the boy pouted at the end of the race. I simply shrugged, smiled, and continued to beat him every day after that. Throughout my pre-teen years, I made sports a focus, keeping up with the boys and excelling in Physical Education classes. While girls stood off to the side, afraid to catch the ball; I bounded down the field, scoring the game winning point or touchdown. Sometimes my male peers would actually fight over which team I was on. It was clear to me that I fit in well as "one of the boys."

This is not to say that I grew up without female friends, rather it has always been easy for me to develop friendships with both girls and boys. My male friendships thrived due to my action-oriented nature. Scott Swain identifies that males typically find "closeness in doing," as this cultivates a sense of camaraderie (1989). Hence, my own inherent need for activity allowed me to easily befriend males. Meanwhile, my female friendships thrived in more intimate settings, such as slumber parties where we could watch movies, cuddle, and stay up late talking. This affirms that women value talk and face to face interaction as the way to cultivate a

friendship (Wright, Scanlon, 1991). Furthermore, I have always craved empathy and depth in relationships. I have observed through my conversations over the past few months, that I have a permeable ego-boundary, or a strong willingness and capacity to engage in feeling the feelings of my friends (Fixmer-Oraiz, Wood, 2017) which allows my friends (both female and male) to feel comfortable opening up to me. When I asked my friends how they would describe me, I received adjectives such as: “loyal”, “trustworthy” and “empathetic.” My gender performance of action-orientation partnered with my permeable ego-boundary allow me to smoothly navigate friendships with both males and females.

A Free Pass to Perform Masculine?

“How do you have v-lines? Those are for boys” My childhood friend inquired as I appeared in my bikini, ready to go in her pool. Confused, I crouched to look at my abdomen. It was toned like normal. This was the first time I became aware that it made me look like a boy.

At Pepperdine, the culture of appearance is one that enhances feminine performance in dress and style. Thus over the past few months, I have looked at my own dress, use of makeup, and overall attempt to fit the style. What I have found is that when I dress nice or wear makeup, it is not out of a desire to fit in, rather it is because I just felt like wearing a dress or eyeliner that day, I have never been too concerned with fitting the norm. However, what I did find is that because I am an athlete, it seems as though I get a free pass to wear athletic clothes whenever I want. This means that as long as I am wearing my Pepperdine athletic gear, I am not actually breaking the Pepperdine appearance expectations. Another interesting observation is that I received different responses from peers toward my appearance.

For example, I found on days that I wore a dress or straightened my hair, I received an increase of appearance based compliments from females and no significant changes in my interactions with males. This supports data that shows females overall receive more appearance based compliments (Parisi, Wogan, 2006). On the flip side, if I wore athletic clothes, my male friends were more likely to ask about my workouts. This is fascinating because it works against research that shows that men engage in complimenting women on their appearance rather than skill (2006). Perhaps my perception as “one of the boys” yields this unique response.

Even with my free pass, I still experience the dichotomy between strong and beautiful in the Pepperdine athletics community. Throughout my three and a half years at Pepperdine and fifteen years as an athlete, I have had a plethora of coaches comment on the inadequacies or of my body. In middle school, while I was going through puberty and was severely underweight, a coach told me that my tall and thin physique made me ideal for my sport. During my high school years, my sprints coach wanted me to bulk up while my jumps coach wanted me to remain light as a feather. At Pepperdine, I had gained weight after studying abroad. After having the flu and barely eating for a week, my coach applauded me for visibly losing some weight. These messages not only promote dangerous methods to losing or maintaining weight, but they also employ that there is one way that a female athlete should look, when in fact there are many athletic body types. Runner Jennifer Levin asserts her body cannot be confined to one standard, “the body that can run and love, give birth, sob, suffer” (Levin in Gottesman, Biddle, 2001). The unfortunate reality is that most female athletes engage with negative body talk, at Pepperdine and beyond. While I may be able to dress and perform masculine on

Pepperdine's campus, I still face a dichotomy between strong and beautiful.

A Sweet Girl Speaking with Conviction

"Hi sweet girls" the sorority president said in her sing-songy voice as she addressed the Pepperdine chapter of Pi Beta Phi. As a freshman, I observed how she always spoke so softly, composed, but difficult to hear. A lot of her statements ended in upspeak. Upspeak is the rising of tonation at the end of a sentence so that it sounds like a question rather than a statement (DuChene, Gillen, 2017). The Pepperdine chapter of Pi Beta Phi is known as the "sweet Christian girls". Although I deeply respected the older women in my sorority, their lack of conviction always bothered me. Now that I am a senior with an executive role, I have observed that I pointedly speak loud and clear, intentionally avoiding upspeak. Although this more directive and masculine performance is atypical for our chapter, I have had many members laud me for my confidence and clarity. Over the past few months I have observed that while my sorority embodies femininity in many ways, it has actually been the place where I have been most freely able to perform female masculinity, simply because I am accepted the way I am.

Throughout my self-analysis, I have searched for other occasions in which I speak with the same level of conviction as I do in my chapter. I found two instances. The first is when I am in other leadership settings (such as leading the warm up for the track team). This makes sense, since the purpose of my speech is similar. However, the second instance occurs when I am the only female in a group of males. I speak loudly and with authority so that my voice does not get drowned out. This also goes against research that says that women who speak with the same style as men are less likely to be listened to by men (Logan, 1997). Perhaps this too goes

back to the fact that I fit in as "one of the boys" and therefore my male peers perceive me as one of their own.

Dissonance in Relational Expectations

"Are platonic relationships between females and males possible?" is the title of one of my journal entries from my sophomore year of college. I stumbled upon this entry as I read through old journals to remember past experiences of relational dissonance. The dissonance comes when friendships that I perceive to be platonic are perceived to be romantic by the male counterpart. This can happen in two different ways: either the male experiences romantic feelings for me, or believes that I feel romantically for him. It seems to work in phases. Initially, I befriend a male because we have a shared interest that is usually activity based. The longer we are friends, the more my personal and empathetic side surfaces, allowing for vulnerable conversations and stronger feelings of emotional connectedness. It is here that the dissonance sets in. While I perceive this level of intimacy to be normal in a friendship, the male perceives this intimacy to imply that we are more than friends. It is true that men benefit from the emotional closeness they gain from a female friendship (Fixmer-Oraiz, Wood, 2017), however it seems as though they have trouble seeing the line between platonic and romantic. This unfortunately has caused some of my friendships to suffer. Through my self-analysis, I have concluded that my own gender performance, which encompasses both female masculinity and a permeable ego boundary, can be confusing because I am operating on two sides of the binary gender system. It is important that I am aware of this behavior so that I can attempt to avoid dissonance in my relationships with both males and females.

Moving Forward

“I praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are Your works; my soul knows it very well” (Psalms 139:14 ESV). Throughout my self-analysis, I am forced to remind myself of this truth from the Psalms. It is not easy to feel outside the box, even though the box may be arbitrary. Many of the messages I receive from society make me feel out of place. However, the most important thing is that I am true to who I am and who God created me to be. With more knowledge and acceptance of myself, I have

greater awareness of my actions and my decisions and how they can affect others. Moving forward, I intend to use this awareness of my authentic self to create a space where others can feel safe and accepted in their own authenticity. Additionally, I plan to continue to reflect upon my past experiences that have shaped the way I am today. Also, I strive to identify female role models that will guide me in the way I want to be. Finally, I will remember that I am strong, I am powerful, and I am beautiful.

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